BLUE EYE

OGAL ALLA

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A STORY OF

THE PEOPLE OF THE PLAINS

BY

OGAL ALLA

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To My Wife.

INTRODUCTION.

"Ef it's clippin' kewpons er mules' tails yer choosin' fer a perfession, clip th' kewpons; it's more prof'table an' not so dangerous."

There is no place in America where the early settlers met with greater difficulties than did "The people of the plains." The country between the Rocky mountains and the Missouri, the Arkansas and the Platte rivers might be called a great battlefield. The Indians never fought harder to hold a territory than they did for this great plain. This was the hunting ground for tribes from north and south, and many a rancher gave up his life while trying to build a home. But as a great general once said, "They were born for that; the foundations of states are always laid on aching hearts." But it has ever been American to take chances; "th' shore things air all roped an' branded."

The people who settled along the streams of this great plain dreamed of herds of cattle as numerous as the buffalo—it was the almighty dollar that led them on. Some called it adventure, but "the dollar mark is about the crookedest thing I ever saw."

The stockmen drove the Indians and buffalo from these plains, but settlers came, and now cattle kings and cowboys are of the past—three

great changes in forty years. Who can look into the future and tell what changes the next forty years will bring?

To the old time cowboys with whom I rode for fifteen years, whose cultus corries are now ended, I bid a fond Klahowya.

CHAPTER I.

I was only a lad when I made my way into Colorado and went to work on the range. During the first three years of my cowboy life I cut four sets of eye teeth, and saw many things that were not on the level—for instance, the Rocky mountains. But I did not get real busy until I commenced work for the Three Bar cattle company, in the seventies, and at once commenced to see things.

It was a lovely spring day when I rode up to the home ranch on the Arickaree, and was greeted by a kindly fellow I had known as Tobe. He extended his hand, told me to unsaddle my pony, turn him into the pasture, and come in.

"Had anything t' eat t'day?" he asked, as he knocked the ashes from his pipe, and patted my horse on the neck.

"Not since morning," I replied.

"Then come right in."

I followed as he led the way, for it was three o'clock, and I had ridden fifty miles that day, and, as he remarked when I had finished the lunch, "brought my appetite with me."

"Whar'd ye come from," he asked, after I had refused "something more."

From Los Animas. Been on the trail three days. Stopped over on the Beaver last night, with old Uncle Zach Foiley.

"Well, I'm mighty glad ye've come. Goin' t' stay with us this summer?"

"Yes, if Dan wants another man."

"Wall, he does, an' jis' tother day we wus talkin' 'bout ye. He's never forgot th' little favor ye done 'im las' summer, when ye wus together down on th' Picket Wire, an' th' Mexicans stole 'is hosses. From O' Kaintuck, ain't ye, same 's I am?"

"No, from North Carolina."

"Wall, it's nearly th' same. Gran' ol' south lan'. Like t' see a nice southern gal ag'in? Wall, I'll jis' show ye one."

He pulled a bundle of letters from his pocket, handed me a photo, but reached over, took the picture, put it back into his pocket, and continued:

"No, that ain't th' one. That's my sister Nellie. 'Blue Eye,' we called 'er; killed by th' Injuns nearly two y'ars ago. Yes, Injuns killed my father, mother, brother an' two sisters."

Here he stopped, turned his head, and wiped his eyes.

"Ah! here she is. Purty fine gal, eh?"

"Truly a beautiful girl. One I could fall in love with myself," I remarked as I handed him back the photo.

"Shore ye would; but she's all mine. I got a ranch up th' river, an' some cows an' hosses on th' range, an' she's goin' t' be th' missis o' thet place."

"What's her name, Tobe?"

"Miss Hansom—Edna Hansom. 'Bout a y'ar f'om this fall ye'll see me hittin' th' trail fer th' railroad a-goin' back after 'er. I want t' see

me ole Kaintucky home a'gin, so I'll make th' visit an' bring 'er home 'ith me. But I mus' go an' git supper. Th' boys'll be in purty soon, so ye can amuse yerself fer a few minutes."

My pony did not take very kindly to the horses I had turned him out with, but stood at the gate looking up toward the house. I asked Tobe for some dry bread, which I took down to him. Muggins was not as handsome, perhaps, as some horses; he was a dark iron gray, with black, heavy mane and tail, weighed about a thousand pounds, but was gentle and true as steel. He never saw a trail so long that he could not carry me from one end of it to the other in a day, and was always ready for a trip the next day.

"Supper's ready, men," I heard Tobe say, as I returned to the house.

The foreman, Old Dan, as the boys called him, was glad to see me, and as the other boys came in he introduced me to Uncle Jimmy, Tomato Charley, Speck and Hen, the two Dutch boys. Arkansaw Bill, one of the Bar T. riders, came in later, got a bite to eat, took a few shots at the house cat, then turning to me, asked:

"Whar'd ye come from, ye Mexican hoss thief?"

Without waiting for a reply he took a shot at one of my bootheels, cutting off about half of it. He then mounted his horse and started south, singing:

"Oh! I'm a she wolf an' it's my night t' howl."

It was lucky for him—and the writer, too, probably—that my sixshooter was out on my saddle, for as it was, he rode away peacefully, and

I went out to the tool house and mended my boot.

The ranch houses were good, substantial, sod buildings, situated on the south bank of the Arickaree river, a stream that runs between the North and South Republican rivers, and flows into the North fork a few miles above the junction of the two streams.

The company owned about six thousand head of cattle, a thousand horses, and in addition to several hundred acres of fine hay land at the home ranch, owned another ranch about seventy miles up the river, called "The Meadows," where they wintered their saddle horses and part of their cattle.

"Yes," said the foreman, when I spoke to him about a place, "I'll send you out in a few days. I am going out to the roundup with Charley, so when I get back will fit you out. Help about the ranch here till I get in."

There was nothing for me to do but wait, so I assisted Uncle Jimmy, the oldest inhabitant, as Tobe called him, and Speck. Speck was just from the fadderland, was "red-headed" and so freckled it was difficult to tell whether he was white with brown spots, or brown with white spots. I understood at once why the boys called him Speck. He was about seventeen years old, and although the homeliest boy I ever saw, during all the years I knew him he never shirked nor forgot a friend. He would work overtime that he might assist some one else with their work.

When the foreman returned, he called me into his room one evening after supper and com-

menced to relate reminiscences of earlier days. Uncle Jimmy came in, not so much that he wanted a cigar, but that he was very curious, and being a privileged character, generally came and went as he pleased.

"I want you to take Speck," said the foreman, as he handed me another cigar, "and go up and take charge of the Meadows ranch. Here is a letter to the foreman up there telling him to come down here. I have not said so in the letter, but I am going to discharge him. There are too many cattle in that country with fresh brands, and I want you to keep a close watch on the fellows who are doing the rebranding and butchering cattle. The letter will dispose of the foreman, and if necessary you can discharge the help he has there now. I am determined to break up that gang of thieves if it takes a hanging bee to do it. I have my suspicions as to part of the gang, but as I have no positive proof will mention no names. I have been wishing you would come up and work for me, not that I wanted you to do a lot of disagreeable work, but I wanted some one I could trust and one they will not be suspecting. You can fix to start in the morning, and stay until the hay is put up."

Uncle Jimmy, who had been listening to the foreman's instructions, got up, walked across the room, stretched himself, yawned, and as he turned to leave the room, said he remembered the time when all the soft jobs were given to tenderfeet, but now they took nothing but positions as foremen. I told Tobe what I was to do and he seemed much disappointed.

"I thought ye wus goin' out 'ith me," he said, "an' I'd be mighty glad ef ye would, I hev to start out 'ith th' mess wagon day after tomorrie an' cook fer th' roundup. I'll meet th' boys down b'low th' mouth o' Burntwood, an' work up th' south side 's fer 's th' T. T. ranch, I guess. Then th' next trip we go south t' th' Arkansaw."

I told him I would rather go with him, as I did not like the work assigned me, but not having any choice in the matter would start for the Meadows in the morning.

"And now about Arkansaw Bill—where is he working?"

"Over 't th' Bar T. Why? Don't ye like 'im?"

"Well, I have seen him a few times, and although I never had any trouble with him, I am frank to say I do not like him. He's a big bluffer, and if I am not badly mistaken is dishonest. Now I am not prejudiced against him because he shot my bootheel off, but I never liked his looks. I took some cattle away from him last summer over on the deer trail that he was driving away, and he of course doesn't like me; but there is no love lost so far as I am concerned. When I see a rider driving cattle away from their home range, I make it my business to turn those cattle back, even if it takes a scrap to do it. So far as I know this is all there is between us. I would do the same thing again, no matter who the rider was, as that is one of the things I am hired to do. Bill may be all right, but if he works with your wagon this summer, keep a

close watch and see who throws the strays into the roundup."

" Wall, now, I nacherly thought he wus a good feller," said Tobe, " 'cept when he's drinkin'. Course he's all wrong then. I think ye'll fin' Bill straight, but sence ye mention it, I'll jis' keep me eyes squinted in his direction."

Tobe was of the same opinion as all the other boys, but if you will read you will see how easy it is for some men to deceive their associates.

CHAPTER II.

The next day Speck and I started on our journey to the Meadows. The foreman had given us four big work horses and a splendid string of saddle horses, and when all was ready mounted his own horse and accompanied us to the state line, or rather the state corner. Here he pointed out a large white post standing just south of us, but not visible from the trail going up the river until one had passed it.

"There," said he, "is Kansas; there is Colorado on that side, and this is Nebraska; I wish you would remember that, for it becomes necessary for some people to change their residence very suddenly some times, and I have known men not only to go from one state to another in this locality, but be in three states inside of that many seconds."

He then bade us good-bye, admonishing us to do well what we found to do, tilted back his head and started back down the river singing,

"I left the parlor early,
"I think 'twas scarcely nine,
"When by some lucky fortune—"

and disappeared behind a small bluff.

"There is Kansas; that is Colorado on that side, and this is Nebraska; I wish you would remember that, for it becomes necessary for some people to change their residence very suddenly some times."

These words kept ringing in my ears.

Did he think I was a Mexican horse thief as Arkansaw Bill called me? No, it couldn't be that, or he would never have trusted me to take charge of the upper ranch. And, besides, there were few officers in the country, except self-appointed and self-constituted committees, and these men did not stop to consider jurisdictional lines.

"A gang of thieves must be gotten rid of."

Why should be select me to do such work instead of sending some older and better posted man? I finally came to a conclusion, and afterwards learned I was right. I was practically a stranger in the country and would not be suspected, whereas, if some one who was well known was sent up there, the little "close herd" could be driven back into the hills and no positive proof be obtained as to who the "rustlers" were. But I was sad at heart. The hills were covered with cattle as far as the eye could reach. Gray wolves and coyotes went skulking across the creek bottom, and antelope and buffalo grazed among the cattle. All interesting, but I was not in the proper mood to enjoy my surroundings. There was work of a serious nature ahead of me, and in order to make a good report when I returned I must do that work well.

We had trudged on through the sand, making slow progress, coming finally to a spring where a dim trail led back southward from the river, and went into camp. The horses were hobbled, and while Speck was building a fire and making ready for the night, I took my tackle, walked down to the river and caught perch enough for supper and breakfast. We had eaten our evening meal, rolled out our beds, and as night came

on realized more than ever that we were "strangers in a strange land." Little bands of Indians could be seen crossing the country, and the dead carcasses of buffalo and range cattle with only a steak or two cut from the back were proof that paint and feathers were in demand.

Now, an Indian is all Indian—there is no other way of describing him. Those we met were friendly enough, but we felt better without their company.

"Somebody coomin'," said Speck, as he sprang to his feet, clutching at me as he rose.

Turning around to look up the river in the direction he was pointing, I saw two riders approaching. I turned back onto my bed and appeared to be perfectly at ease, telling Speck to let them do the talking.

"How?" said one of the riders, at the same time dismounting beside our wagon.

"Got anything t' eat?" asked one of them.

"Yes," I replied, "I think we can find you a little something," at the same time getting up and going to the wagon.

"Don't put yerself out any; jis' give us a biscu't an' a can o' tomaties apiece, an' we'll eat that. We're in a hurry t'night, an' can't stop long. Whar ye goin'?"

"Taking supplies up to the Meadows," I replied. "How far is it from here?"

"Oh, I guess it's 'bout forty mile. Ever up this way b'fore?"

"No, I just came from Texas. I wanted to rest a few days, and am making this trip to see the country." This was a story made from

whole cloth, but as I did not know who I was talking to, thought that best.

"Goin' t' work fer this here outfit when ye git back?"

"No, I think not. I want to go up on the Platte. When I left Texas, I headed north, and think I will keep going." This was story number two.

"Wall, so-long, boys, we've got a long ride b'fore us. We're goin' 'cross t' th' South Fork t' meet th' roundup. Come, Peg, we mus' be goin'. So-long, boys."

As they turned back up the river, I kept wondering why they did not go south over the trail that led out from our camp, if they were really going to South Fork. I spoke to Speck about this, but he could assign no reason, so I told him to stay at camp, and I would follow them and see where they turned off. I walked slowly along the trail, perhaps a half mile, following them as closely as possible. I could hear them talking, and soon discovered there were three of them, and that they were driving a small herd of cattle.

"Who wus them fellers, Sim?" came a voice I had not heard before.

"Wall, sir, Pete, we're mighty r'lieved. Jis' a couple o' tenderfeet takin' supplies up t' th' Medders. Good thing we got out o' there, though; they might o' spicioned somethin' an' tol' Ol' Dan; but we're all right. We'll make it over t' Cottonwood gulch, an' have th' fresh uns (meaning cattle they had rebranded) hid away down th' canyon, an' th' butcherin' done,

an' th' meat 't th' shop b' th' time they reach th' Medders."

"An' no tracks lef' uncovered, either," responded Peg.

I returned to camp and told Speck what I had heard, that I intended following them, and that he must watch camp.

"I not like to look on dees camp. I peen too oxcited. Better ve both go. You vill mebbe need some help, aind it?"

"No, I will get along all right, and nothing will harm you. Should anyone come along, just tell them that old Dan is with you and will be back in a short time."

I went out, caught Muggins, and when I returned found Speck making ready to go with me.

"Injuns out there," he stammered as I bade him come and assist me.

I looked in the direction he was pointing, and a few rods away stood a big black steer with horns about as long as one's arms, pawing up the sand. I picked up a rock and threw at him, and he went galloping away.

"Now, Speck," said I, "no more Injun business; stay here and watch camp. Go to bed, and tomorrow put in the time shooting wolves if they come in range, but be careful not to shoot any of our horses or any one's cattle. If I do not get back till tomorrow night, I will be humming that Dutch song you taught me; so be careful not to point your Winchester that way."

I gave Muggins a sandwich with some sugar on it, and started south, following the dim trail. A few miles out from the river the trail disappeared, but watching the stars closely I pushed

on in the direction I had been traveling. Every howl of the coyotes startled me, every strange noise increased my fear, but I had no thoughts of turning back. I had dismounted and was hunting for the trail, when the neighing of a horse caused me to spring back into the saddle without using the stirrup. Muggins answered, and I gave him a severe jerking. Again the horse neighed, and Muggins started to answer, and quickened his pace. I kept jerking him, as I did not want him to answer, fearing it might be one of the cattle thieves. From repeated neighs I knew the horse was coming towards me. My first thought was to turn and run, but I realized instantly it would be useless, for I did not know the country, and I presumed every one else did. With sixshooter in hand I stood my ground. I had not long to wait—just long enough for my heart to get up into my throat—when the horse stopped a few feet from me, and gave a whistle that I think could have been heard a mile. I felt relieved when I saw there was no rider, but a wild stallion was not what I was looking for. He gave another whistle, circled around me, then galloped off in the direction from whence he came.

"What a fool I was," I said to myself, as I jogged along, reining my horse a little to the left. I grew very brave after I saw there was no danger.

"What does this mean, Muggins?" I said, talking aloud to my horse, for we had been going down hill for a couple of miles. Muggins did not answer, but stopped suddenly and refused to go on. I climbed down to see what was the mat-

ter, and found we were alongside a wire fence. Knowing I could learn nothing more until daylight, I unsaddled my pony, that he might rest and feed. Using my saddle for a pillow, I stretched out on the grass, and was soon sound asleep and did not wake until six o'clock the next morning.

CHAPTER III.

I resolved to ride up the creek and endeavor to find water for myself and pony, then make a still hunt and learn what I could about the inhabitants of the canyon. I had not gone far when I came in sight of a dugout, almost hidden by a clump of small cottonwood trees. Coming to a gate, I opened it and rode down to the house. While the pony and I were drinking at the spring, a slim, dark complexioned fellow with piercing black eyes came out of the dugout and asked:

"What ye doin' in hyah?"

"Not harming any one, I hope," and I reached down after another cup of water.

"Whar ye bin? Whar'd ye come from?"

"I don't know. I've been lost, and was almost choked for a drink, and am very hungry. Could I get some breakfast?"

"Yas, I reckon ye kin, if ye'll wait. Th' wolves stampeded our cattle las' night, an' th' other boys is out after 'em. I bin waitin' fer 'em t' come, an' when they do, we'll hev a bite."

I staked my pony as he directed, and followed him into the dugout. We did not have long to wait, for almost immediately in came two as tough looking characters as I had ever seen. The one I had been talking to explained all before they had a chance to say a word. They nodded to each other and began to eye me closely. The larger one of the three did most

of the talking. I recognized his voice, and knew they were the three fellows I had been following. I had found what I was hunting for, but was wishing I hadn't. Growing nervous under their gaze, and fearing they might recognize my voice, I went back to the spring, for I knew they would not let me go without further questioning. I was soon called in, however, and we all sat down to breakfast. They were as hungry as I, so nothing was said to me, and I began to think that all I would have to do would be to get up, thank them and ride away. But I was sadly disappointed in this, for as soon as breakfast was over, Sim turned facing me, and said:

"Now, sir, I guess we're 'bout ready t' 'tend t' yer case. Bin lost, hev ye? Don't know whar ye come f'om, ner whar ye're goin'? Wall, when a feller comes 'long hyar what don't hev a better story 'an that ter tell, we jis' make it our business to see 'at he don't interfere too much with other folkses' ranches an' cattle. We're peaceable, law 'bidin' men, an' ever' dam — — — what ever come hyar pryin' roun' has stayed. We've got a private boneyard up hyar on th' hill, an' we reckoned 'while ago when ye wus out thet we'd jis' plant ye 'longside o' them fellers who'd got cur'us, an' come inside, not waitin' fer a invitation."

"You have the water all fenced," I replied, "so I had to come in for a drink and to water my pony. This, I understand is government land, and I do not consider that I am a trespasser. You have certain rights that the public

must respect, but since I have not harmed you nor your stock, I shall go my way."

"Not jis' yit, stranger; we 'spect ye'll stay hyar quite 'while. Takin' supplies up ter th' Medders ranch, air ye? Wall, then, why didn't ye do it? Las' night after we lef' yer wagon, I jis' 'lowed mebbe one o' ye'd try follerin' us, so I turned back an' foun' yer Dutch pardner alone. He tried t' tell me ol' Dan 'ould soon be thar, but didn't know whar ye went? Wall, th' boy 'll fin' 'is bones thar by th' spring, all picked clean by th' coyotes. See this blood on me sixshooter? I didn't want ter shoot 'im, so I jis' mashed 'is head, an' left 'im by th' side o' th' wagon; but we'll give yer carcass a decent burial. Ye see, we allers hold th' funer'l services afore th' grave 's dug. Kin ye sing bass?"

"Not at my own funeral," I replied, somewhat amused at his question.

"Then ye'll hev t' do th' prayin', an' jine in th' chorus. Boys, ye kin git th' rope, an' make ready. He's shore a spotter, an' we'll jis' plant 'im."

What gave me courage to bear up under the awful strain I could never tell. I knew I could kill one, and possibly two of them, but three made the chance too great; so I resolved to delay matters all I could, with the hope that assistance might reach me. But this did not seem probable, so when Peg and Pete left, my first thought was to catch my man off his guard, kill him, and then fight the other two. He evidently read my thoughts, for there he sat, sixshooter in hand, watching me, with scarcely a wink of the eye or the twitching of a muscle. The rope was

brought and I was told to march in front. One of them reached out and took my sixshooter, and it was then I felt that all was lost. When we reached the spring I asked if I might get a drink of water. I then stepped over to my saddle, took a flask of brandy from my canteen, and asked them to have a drink with me. To this they readily assented, but insisted that I should drink first. I did so, then walked to where my pony was standing and leaned against him for support.

"Good licker, boys," said Pete, as he wiped his mouth with his coat sleeve.

"Yes, an' a dam' good saddle an' pony. They're to be my pay fer helpin' do this job," said Peg, and he came closer to admire the outfit.

"Wall, now I reckon I'll have somethin' t' say," broke in Sim, "when I've finished this bottle. Mighty good pizen, kid. Whar'd ye git it?"

"Now, look here, boys," said I, ignoring his question. "Do you realize what you are planning to do? Must my life be taken because I came into your pasture to get a drink? Is murdering men in cold blood a part of your daily vocation? Show me where I have done wrong and I will walk bravely to yonder tree and adjust the noose. You call me a spotter. Can you prove it? Look at my pony, then throw your rope aside. I am not pleading for mercy, but if you are men and not cowards, you will give back my sixshooter, and allow me to go my way. If it is a fight you want, one at a time, and we will have it out."

Peg had looked Muggins over carefully, and when he spoke his words gave me new hope.

"No Three Bar 'bout this hoss, boys. Come f'om th' Dowlin' ranch, down on Big Smoky."

"Ain't it a Three Bar hoss?" asked Sim.

"No, I tell ye; he's out o' th' Dowlin' herd. Whar'd ye git 'im?"

"Bought him out of a herd at Wallace," I replied.

"Wall, now thar's somethin' strange 'bout this," said Sim, "but I b'lieve in bein' on th' safe side, an' dead men don't tell no tales. Come on hyah, an' no more o' yer back talk," and he struck me over the head with his sixshooter, the blow knocking me down.

When I regained consciousness I was standing under the big cottonwood with one end of the rope around my neck and the other over a limb. All seemed to be ready, but they were evidently waiting for me to recover sufficiently to assist in the ceremonies. Sim was doing the talking.

"Want t' send any message t' yer fr'en's?"

"No."

"Want t' do a little prayin'?"

"No, sir, not in the presence of such a band of cowardly murderers as you are."

"Goin' t' die brave all right, ain't 'e, boys? Thought mebbe he'd show th' white feather. Kin ye sing bass now, 'f we lead off on some ol' f'miliar tune?"

I did not reply, but took my handkerchief and was wiping the blood from my forehead when he gave the rope a jerk that nearly lifted me off my feet. I grabbed for the rope and slacked the noose as he continued:

"Don't be too pertic'lar, kid; the taste uv a little blood 'll make ye die braver. We'll fix yer

han's d'rec'ly. Now we're goin' to sing, an' ye'll jine in er up ye go 't th' end o' th' first verse."

"Nearer my God to—"

He dropped the rope, threw up his hands and fell forward. Peg dropped beside him. Pete turned to run, uttered an oath and fell beside an old sod corral. I had thrown the rope from my neck, grabbed my sixshooter from Sim, which was tightly grasped in his right hand, and as I looked up saw Speck coming down the hill waving his hand and shouting. It was his Winchester that had joined in the chorus.

CHAPTER IV.

Just what happened the next few moments neither of us remembered, but I felt that I had really sung bass at my own funeral. We were soon at the spring, however, washing and dressing our wounds. Speck was so weak from loss of blood he could scarcely stand, but the sup of brandy left in the flask revived him greatly, and we went into the dugout. Then he sat down upon the bed and began talking of Indians. I hid his Winchester, fearing he might take me for one, and from what I had just witnessed I did not care to stand before his deadly fire. I gave him some coffee, broiled him a beefsteak, and finally persuaded him to lie down and sleep. While he slept he kept murmuring, "Dan vill coom pack once, putty soon alretty. I don't know vere he vent, mebbe mit der rountupe."

What to do I did not know. It was almost a day's ride to the nearest ranch, and I could not leave Speck. Poor boy! What he had suffered I would probably never know. When he opened his eyes I spoke to him, but received no sign of recognition. He closed his eyes again, and whispered something in his native tongue, that I could not understand. The strain was telling on me, so I walked out to the spring, bathed my head, and sat down in the shade of a little cottonwood. As I wept I felt that my hair was turning gray. How long I lived during the few brief moments I sat there

I will never know. The blood was still flowing from my wound, and I felt as if I would like to go to sleep, never again to awake on the horrible scene before me. Three dead bodies lay near where I sat, and I had but little hope for poor Speck, who had followed the rustlers and saved my life. The howl of a coyote aroused me from my reverie, and after bathing my head again I went back to the dugout. With silent tread I approached the bedside, but when I took Speck's hand he awoke and sat up. There was joy in that old dugout when he recognized me, and our sore heads bumped together in a long, fond embrace. He wanted to tell me about what had happened, but I bade him keep quiet until I could make another cup of coffee. We drank the coffee, ate a few bites and together walked down to the spring. I left him there and went up over the ridge, cut the wire and brought him his horse. I then took a spade that had done similar service before, went up back of the dugout, prepared a grave for three, carried lumber from the corral, and made a box to fit it. Muggins acted as pallbearer and the three unknown bodies were laid away. The board at the head of their grave contained but four words, burnt with a branding iron—"Sim, Pete and Peg." Speck and I then took up the long journey back to our wagon, but instead of going over the sand hills, followed down the little creek. At the lower end of the pasture there were a number of freshly branded cattle and a few horses, so we cut the wires and drove them down to the river. Here we struck the trail, and although quite dark, finally reached our camp more dead than

alive. The medicine box was brought out, our wounds dressed, the beds rolled out, and we lay down to sleep and dream of the events of the past twenty-four hours, the most thrilling we had ever experienced. We did not awake until quite late the next morning, and at once discovered that all our horses, save the two we had ridden the day and night before, had wandered off. After breakfast I saddled Muggins, made him a sandwich, mounted, gave him the rein, and soon came up with our cavey on their way down the river towards the home ranch. On the way back to camp, I shot a buffalo calf, so we had plenty of fresh meat during the time we remained at the spring. Breaking camp early the sixth morning since we left the home ranch, we drove on up the river. We reached the Meadows late that afternoon and were given a royal welcome by the three men we found there, for they had seen no one from the "outside" for several months; and besides, we had brought them a fresh supply of provisions.

The ranch house, stables and corrals were good, substantial buildings. The horse pasture, a tract four by six miles, was enclosed with a three wire fence. For a week I did nothing but take notes and acquaint myself with the surroundings, and obey instructions from the foreman we had found in charge. Speck was impatient, and as we were riding out one morning to look over the hay land, asked:

"Vy dondt you fire dot feller? I dondt like his looks, alretty yet, und I vish you send him avay."

"I have a couple more trips to make yet, Speck," I replied, "then I will ask Mr. Fitzpatrick (the boys called him Fitz) to report for duty at the home ranch."

One of the trips was west to the upper water holes. Here I found a small band of Indians who were short on talk and tobacco, but long on war paint and feathers. Through an interpreter, a beautiful girl, I promised them heap muck-a-muck when they came down to the ranch, and after dividing my tobacco and giving the chief my pipe, I left them, but kept wondering who the girl was who had done the talking for us. A few days later I made the trip back to Cottonwood gulch. When I reached the bluff where I could see the gate at the upper end of the pasture, I quickly adjusted my field glasses and saw Arkansaw Bill drive in a small band of cattle, close the gate and turn back south. When Bill had disappeared I rode down to the dugout, going through the fence where I had cut the wire that eventful day to take in Speck's horse. I made a search about the corral, and found an old well covered with loose boards on which dirt and rocks had been thrown. This well was full of beef hides, the brands having been cut out and destroyed. I knew then that the killing of other people's cattle was the chief occupation of those who had lived in the dugout, and knew, too, there were others besides the three who were sleeping across the gulch back of the spring. After watering my horse I rode down the creek to the river and camped for the night. I returned to the Meadows the next day, going around the pasture and com-

ing in from the south, as I did not want Fitz to know where I had been. I had suspected for several days that he was one of the gang.

"Whar'd yer pardner go, Speck?" asked Fitz, as soon as I had left the ranch.

"I tink he vent over mit der rountupe."

"How long 'll 'e be gone?"

"Oh, youst a coople of tays, I dunno, aind it."

"Say, I noticed a big gash on th' side uv 'is head, longer'n my finger, an' th' skin on yore head's in strips like a hide 'ith th' bran's cut out. What 've you fellers bin up ag'inst?"

"Vell, pefore ve schtardt upe here, ve all go town to Binkleman's mit der dancehouse, vonce, und ve go in mit der cyclone I dunno, und der poys from der Blatte dry t' do us upe. Vell, ve knock der sixshooters avay mit our heads, und drag 'em out. Mebbe ven you not like dot head alretty, you know vat to do mit it."

The boys laughed, more, I think, at Speck's brogue than at the fun we were supposed to have had at the dance house.

When I returned I found the boys still amusing themselves at Speck's expense, and of course he was glad I had come.

"You fire dot feller, right avay qu'vick, I dunno, aind it."

"I shall give him Dan's letter in the morning, and presume he will leave at once for the lower ranch."

"Bresume, ees it. Von't you make him go?"

I merely nodded my head, for we were nearing the house, so we joined the boys at the supper table, and all went well till morning.

CHAPTER V.

"Mr. Fitzpatrick," I said, taking the letter from my pocket, "here is a communication from Dan. You may read it aloud that the boys may know that I am to take charge of the ranch here."

He read the letter, turned and stuck it in the stove. His face grew red, and gripping his six-shooter with one hand and pointing at me with the other, said:

"Thet letter don't cut no ice 'ith me. You're on'y a tenderfoot, an' I'm not goin'. No man kin discharge me till he pays me, an' I got four months' wages due me now. You, sir, kin go t' hell ef you want t', but I'm goin' t' stay right here."

"I do not understand that you are discharged, but you can take Buckskin and Mike, the two horses you have been riding since we came up here, and go down below. If there is anything due you, Dan will settle it."

He grew furious, and the language he used would not look well in print. After he had exhausted his supply of choice oaths, and seeing there was no use trying to persuade him, I again told him what horses he might take and told him to go, in language he could not misunderstand. I then turned to the two boys I had found there with him and asked if they would remain or if they wanted to go with Fitz. Tex said he would be glad to stay, but Siwash looked defiant, and as

he walked across the room, said: "Fitz ain't gone yit."

"Not yet, but he is going," I replied, "and you had better go with him. We will try and get along without you. You may roll up your bed, take your own pony and report to Dan at the home ranch. I want no trouble with either of you, but want you both to gather up your personal belongings. I will have Tex and Speck drive in the horses."

They went out to the corral, held a long conference, then came back and commenced to get ready for the trip.

"We've c'ncluded t' go an' not have no trouble 'bout this matter," said Fitz. "Want t' sen' any word down t' th' boys?"

"Nothing special," and I sat down to make a note of what they were packing up.

Their change of mind and cheerfulness had made me suspicious of them. It was only a few moments, however, until all was ready and they rode away.

I found Tex one of the most companionable fellows I had ever met. Well educated, a perfect gentleman at all times, with but one fault I could discover—he would gamble.

"My father," said he, "is the cattle king of Texas, and has staked me several times, but it all went at poker and three card monte. Last spring I got in with the drive and came up the trail. I resolved to stop gambling, but I didn't do it, and when the cattle were delivered on the West Beaver range I was broke. I started north, and finally fell in with a little band of Indians and lived with them up to about two months ago,

when I left them and came down here. I think they are camped at the upper water holes yet, and I would give five years of my life for an opportunity to win my pony, saddle and sixshooter back from them. I think it was along about the holidays that they commenced to celebrate, and about the same time I commenced to win from them at poker. In a few days I owned everything in the village—ponies, blankets, saddles, guns and all. Then I commenced to lose, and they won everything back and all I had with it. I might never have known how it happened, if a girl there had not told me. She is a white girl, and of course does not like Indian ways. They call her Blue Eye. She has often begged me to take her away. She fears the old chief will elect to marry her, and she says she will die before she will live longer with the Indians and lead the life they do. But no girl for me. I couldn't settle down if I tried. My pony and saddle is all I want. Will you go up there with me some day?"

"Yes, if you will return with me, and promise not to gamble with them."

"But I can beat them at their own game. You see it was like this: A young buck knows this girl thinks more of me than she does of him, so he resolved to break me. He would not play, but would 'peep' and make signs to the other players. Then at times he would slip cards. Well, the other players would fill, I would flush, and you know the rest."

"Yes, but I would like to know what has been going on here at the ranch."

"Well, sir, a little of everything except my salary. I have been here about six weeks, and worked hard up to the time you came, but no pay. Haven't had a smoke for a month. I had no money, no horse, so what was I to do but stay here with this band of thieves."

I made no reply, but went out to the store room back of the kitchen where we kept our supplies and got him a package of tobacco. "When that is gone let me know and you shall have another supply. I didn't bring very much with me, but we will both have plenty as long as it lasts." He took the tobacco, and continued:

"It's the worst den I ever saw. Only about a week ago three fellows left here with a band of cattle that had been thrown into the pasture and rebranded. Now I am not telling tales, but simply facts, and you will see plenty to convince you of this if you will only look around the ranch."

"Who were those fellows who took the cattle away you spoke of?"

"Mexican Pete, Old Sim and Peg Leg. I do not know any other names for them. They are desperate characters, and if you ever go up against them do business at once, for they all boast of a record of a half dozen men."

"What had Fitz and Siwash to do with those cattle? Do you suspect them of being members of the gang?"

"Yes, and there is another fellow they call Arkansaw Bill. Their ranch is down the river somewhere. Cattle they can't well rebrand they butcher, and sell to dealers down in the settlement."

"Are there any cattle about the ranch now that these fellows claim?"

"A few. Do you want to see them?"

"Yes. Tomorrow we will take a ride around the pasture and turn everything outside, for all stock must be kept out until the hay is cut."

I gave Tex five silver dollars, told him his time would begin at once and that I would pay him forty-five dollars a month, all of which pleased him very much.

"I'll have my pony, saddle and sixshooter inside of a week, Speck, now just you watch me," I heard him say as they walked out toward the corral.

"But you said you vouldn't gamble some more alretty, aind it."

"Yes, but I've got to have another game with those Indians, and I'll skin them alive, too. They can't queer me, and to show you that I am all right, I'll bet you five that I beat them. I'm a gambler, and a good one."

But Speck had mounted his horse and was riding out across the pasture, singing, "Ther'll be razors a flyin' in the air," which he had translated into German.

We rode the pasture the next day, but the only traces we found of the cattle Tex had told me about was a place where the wire had been cut. We knew Fitz and Siwash had done this, drove the cattle out, and had probably taken them down the river to the ranch in Cottonwood gulch.

"Mebbe dem poys coom pack vonce yet," said Speck.

"Not alone," said Tex. "Fitz and Siwash are bluffers. They might shoot a fellow in the back, but would never pull a gun on a man who was facing them. The other fellows will take care of themselves, and you had better not corner one of them unless you are looking for trouble."

"Tree of dem are mit der angels, now alretty yet, aindt it, Kid?"

But I shut Speck off with a frown.

"How's that, Speck?" asked Tex.

I knew by the look Tex gave me that the remark had aroused his suspicion.

"Never mind, boys," said I, and I at once began to make plans for the morrow.

CHAPTER VI.

We had heard nothing of Fitz and Siwash since they left the ranch, nor had any one else that we knew of. The news of the killing of two men at the springs over on the Arickaree and the disappearance of the three men from Cottonwood gulch had reached the roundup on the Republican. How this news was carried across the country we never knew. Tobe had heard the instructions given Speck and I when we started to the upper ranch, so when the news of the murder on the Arickaree reached him he begged the foreman to allow him to go over there and investigate. About the time Tobe started, Dan had heard the news, and left the home ranch, riding up the river, while Tobe was coming across the divide from the Republican, and would reach the springs on the Arickaree, where the men were reported killed, about the same time. It was getting quite dark when Dan halted at the springs, but he imagined he saw two riders leave, going towards the Meadows. He was just dipping up a drink when Tobe rode up. Each had his sixshooter in hand, and although looking for dead men, were also on the lookout for live ones.

"Have you any particular business here, sir?"

"Fer th' Lord's sake, Dan, don't shoot; I guess we're both on th' same erran'. Nig an' Dandy (meaning his horses) air mighty dry an' I'm nearly choked."

No further explanation was necessary, and after groping about the springs for a few moments, they started up the river.

"I think there are two men ahead of us, Tobe, so be on your guard. If those boys I sent up here have stirred the animals up, something is liable to happen, and we might run into some Indians, too."

Tobe's only reply was, "Yas, I understan'," and for several miles they rode on in silence. Each had brought two horses. They would ride one a few miles and lead the other, then change.

"We ought t' reach th' ranch 'n time fer breakfas', hadn't we, Dan?"

"Yes, I think so, but my horses are getting leg weary, and we may have to stop and rest them. I always dread this ride; there is so much sand. Come on and we will spur up a little, for I want to see what that is ahead of us. I think I saw the sparks from a horse's shoe a moment ago."

On they galloped, their horses' feet making no noise in the sand, save an occasional clank of their shoes.

"There's some one follerin' us, Dan; I kin hear th' heavy breathin' uv 'is hoss."

"No, they are in front of us, I tell you; there, didn't you see the fire again from their horses' shoes?"

They stopped to change horses, and the rider who had been following them pulled out of the trail a few rods, and rode on at full speed. They mounted as quickly as possible, and started on after him.

"Arkansaw Bill fer shore. Now, there's somethin' bringin' him up hyar, Dan, an' I'd jis' like t' know what 't is."

"I don't know, I'm sure. Do you think it possible that he is one of that gang of notorious thieves that have been working their graft on the cattle men of this country?"

"I don't know. Th' kid don't like 'im, an' tol' me th' day he started up hyar thet Bill wus a bad man, an' 'e b'lieved 'e was dishones'. I always liked 'im, though, 'cept when drunk, but he's bin 'way f'om th' roundup 'bout half th' time sence we started out. He come in a couple o' mornin's ago an' 'is hosses wus wet like 'e 'd swum th' river with 'em. He come t' my wagon fer breakfas', an' when I asked where he'd bin he tol' me 'twas none o' my dam business. Tug says some one 'as bin throwin' strays inter th' roundup, an' he b'lieves it 's Bill."

Dan's mind seemed to be at work, for he made no reply. On they rode, with nothing to break the stillness except the clank of their horses' shoes and the howl of the coyotes.

"Hold on there, Tobe, you will run my horses into the wire. Here is the corner of the pasture."

"Shore 'nuff. One more heat, an' then some breakfas'. All day 'n night ride 'ith on'y a snack t' eat—hear thet?"

"Yes. Hurry now, let's see who did the shooting."

A faint light was visible in the east, but it was yet so dark one could only see objects a few rods away.

"Come on, Tobe," Dan kept saying, "we must reach the ranch before those fellows do. The boys up there might need us."

"I'm comin' as fas' 's I—" Just then his horse stepped into a badger hole, turned a somersault, throwing Tobe into the wire fence.

"Are you hurt, Tobe?" asked Dan, as he jumped from his horse and ran to help him up.

"Don't min' me; look after Nig."

There lay the poor horse with his head doubled back under his body and one front leg broken near the shoulder. They helped him up, but he staggered and fell against the wire fence.

"Pore Nig! Pore Nig!" was all Tobe could say. He slacked the cinches of the saddle, sat down, lifted the horse's head into his lap and patted him gently on the neck.

"Come, Tobe, we must shoot the horse and go on. Why, man, your left arm is cut nearly off, and you are bleeding to death!"

"Oh, I ain't hurt much. Let me hol' Nig's head; mebbe it 'll r'lieve 'is sufferin's some. 'Is neck's kinked, too, fer 'e can't straighten 't out."

"Here, now, let me bind your arm and shoulder; cut clear to the bone. Now shoot Nig and we will go on; we can't save him, so we will not leave him to be eaten alive by the wolves."

"Me shoot that hoss? No! I'll stay hyar an' keep th' wolves away, but I'll never kill 'im. I couldn' do it 'f I tried."

"Then get up and walk away. It pains me to do it, but since you refuse I will have to, and the quicker it is done the sooner his sufferings will end."

Tobe bent over, kissed the horse on the neck, took off the bridle and walked away. Dan placed his sixshooter within a few inches of the horse's head and fired, killing him instantly. Tobe walked back to the horse, lifted his head into his lap, again patted the dead animal on the neck, and wept like a child.

"Pore Nig! Pore Nig! I 'll come back an' bury you, my pony. Good-bye, ol' Nigger Boy. No better hoss ever lived 'an you!"

Dan turned his head away and wiped his eyes. He took Tobe by the arm, led him over to where his horse Dandy was standing, and assisted him to cinch the saddle and mount.

"I'll come back an' bury you, Nig," said Tobe, as they rode away, which he did a few days later.

"I think I saw two riders pass us a few moments ago, Tobe, going back down the river."

"Fer God's sake, men, come an' git me, I'm dyin'."

A few feet from the trail, his horse standing near him, lay Siwash, shot through the left breast just above the heart.

"Oh, fer a drink o' water! Take me t' th' ranch, boys, 's quick 's ye kin. I'm done fer, but I want t' see th' boys 'fore I go."

They helped him into the saddle, supporting him as he rode. I had just gotten up, when Speck came rushing in from the corral, so excited he could scarcely tell me what was the matter.

"Tree men comin' upe der trail, alretty. Look at 'em kevick. I tink it's Fritz und Siwash, und dey do us upe aind it."

I took my field glasses, but it was not light enough to see well. I waited a few moments, and when I looked again could recgonize Dan and Tobe.

"Take a cup of water and run out and meet them, Speck," said I; "it's Dan and Tobe. They have a sick man with them and are holding him on his horse. Hurry, now; run as fast as you can."

Speck ran to meet them and handed Siwash the cup of water. He drank it and said:

"Thanks, Speck. You've perlonged m' life a little. Take me t' th' house, boys, 's quick 's ye kin, I want t' lay down."

Dan and Tobe were so overjoyed to find Speck and I safe that they forgot Siwash for a moment, and we had to carry the wounded man into the house ourselves. We laid him on the bed and gave him another drink. Then I took a pan of water and began bathing his face, but he pushed me back.

"It's no use, I'm done fer. They shot me in th' back. But three of 'em won't steal no more. Fitz an' I went down t' th' ranch, dug int' th' grave an' foun' Sim an' Peg an' Pete. Bill come over, so Fitz an' him 'lowed th' Kid an' Speck killed 'em, so started back up here t' do 'em up. At th' spring we heared you fellers comin', so we sep'rated an' Bill follered. I guess ye saw 'im ride 'roun' ye, an' then 'e come up t' us. I tol' 'im I 'lowed I'd had 'nough o' their kin' o' life, an' one uv 'em shot me in th' back, an' I'm done fer. They'll git th' boys here ef they don't stan' guard fer 'em. Yer boss ye sent up here 's all right. He wanted me t' stay

here at th' ranch, an' I ben wishin' I had, but it's too late now. They talked t' me 'bout gittin' rich quick. I went wrong, an' am payin' th' penalty."

"Do you want to send any word to your parents?" asked Dan.

"Yes. There's a letter from mother in m' coat. Jis' tell her th' Injuns got me, so she won't know I disgraced th' fam'ly."

We watched with him until the summons came, then layed him to rest in the corner of the pasture, near the ranch house.

"Too bad," said Tex. "He was a good boy till those fellows led him astray."

Dan remained with us a couple of days, then returned to the home ranch.

"Watch the hay lands closely, and put up every ton of hay you can," were the instructions given us when he was ready to go.

"Tobe, you can remain here a couple of weeks, or until your arm and shoulder are well, then come down to the home ranch."

CHAPTER VII.

"Now, I don't want to worry you, but I must have my horse, saddle and sixshooter."

I turned, and there was Tex, who looked as if he was suffering more on account of the delay in visiting the Indian village again than Tobe was with his sore arm.

"You see," he continued, "those Indians are liable to move any time, and you can never tell where they've gone. Can't you and I go up there tomorrow? I want to see them before they leave the creek."

"Yes, we will go up and see them tomorrow, but not to gamble. I will buy your horse and saddle of them and we will return home. Do you want to bring Blue Eye home with you, too?"

"No, but I do want my pony. That's his name, you know, 'Pony,' and he'll come to me as far as he can hear me call him."

Tex was up bright and early next morning, brought in the horses, then came in and got breakfast.

"It's all ready to happen, boys, and you'll have to crawl out," said he, and he closed the door and commenced to sing:

"Come all you Texas rangers,
Wherever you may be,
And a story I will tell you
That happened unto me."

"Hey dere, Tex, vait a vile und I go out mit a crooked shtick, und turn dot tune vonce alretty."

"To hell with you, Speck, there's no music in your soul."

"Nor some Plue Eye Skivaws mit my head, I dunno, aind it?"

"She's my sweetheart, don't you know," and he took Speck by the arm to show him how Texas coons do the cake walk.

"Now, Tex," said I, as we rode away, "I have brought several packages of tobacco, a pipe for Chief Gray Wolf, and a new silk handkerchief for his best squaw. We will deal fairly with those Indians so they can have no grievance."

"Very well," was his only reply.

He had grown serious, and try as I would, I could not get him to talk. When asked why he was so quiet, he replied:

"I want time to think it over. You can never tell about Indians. If they're hungry, they're mean; if they've had a big feed, they're all right. I may be running you up against it, and if you would rather you can return and I will go it alone."

We rode on a few miles, when he suddenly caught me by the arm with one hand, and pointing ahead with the other, said:

"Look there. You will see something you probably never saw before. A big black eagle chasing an antelope."

It was indeed a strange sight to me. On they came, the eagle trying to fasten its claws into the back of its prey, and the antelope running and dodging for dear life. For half an

hour the chase continued. Over the sand hills, then down into the valley, at times passing within a few yards of us.

"I will kill the antelope if they come in range again," said I, "for they are both nearly tired out. I don't enjoy such a chase as that is now."

"You won't have a chance; it's all off with the antelope now. Come, let's ride up there."

We galloped up to the top of a little sand hill, and there lay the antelope, dead, with the eagle's claws firmly fastened in its back. Tex jumped from his pony and ran up to them with his six-shooter in hand, but I called to him not to shoot the eagle. The great bird backed away a few feet and watched Tex cut the antelope in two and ride off with the hind quarters.

"There is more than he can eat, and this will make the Indians a big feed. We may need a little fresh meat in our business."

I said nothing to Tex about my plans, but had made up my mind to rescue Blue Eye, for I felt sure she was Tobe's sister. While wondering what mood the Indians were really in, and how we were to get the girl away, Tex startled me by saying:

"See the village! Watch those bucks circle around. I believe they've got their war paint on. Shall we take the chance?"

"Yes; we started out to trade a little with them, and we are going to do it; that is, with their permission."

"Shall we take Blue Eye home with us?" he asked.

"Yes, but be careful what you say. If the girl knows you are her friend, let her know that

I am also. You can do this by a nod of the head, and the Indians may not suspect that we intend to take her."

We rode up to Chief Gray Wolf's lodge and dismounted, but he did not receive us as warmly as we had hoped he would. The sight of the meat and tobacco we had brought secured us an audience, however, and he at once became talkative. A wave of his hand and a few grunts quieted the young braves. The antelope was roasted, and all who enjoyed his confidence or belonged to the "Smart Set" surely had a big feed. The meat was torn into long strips and eaten, much as a cow eats a bunch of grass. Meat was a great delicacy with them, for their ammunition was almost gone and the hunters would only shoot at close range. Blue Eye ate a little and enjoyed it, for she told me later she was nearly starved. I could see at once that they were suspicious of Tex, so I kept watching him, fearing he would get too anxious and say or do something that would spoil our plans.

Blue Eye would look at me and then at Tex, but I kept shaking my head at her. When the last bone was picked I gave the chief and his council a fresh supply of tobacco. There were about a dozen to smoke and only four pipes, so Tex and I had to pass our pipes around and smoke when our turns came. They all seemed friendly enough, but watched every move we made. They wanted our sixshooters, saddles, hats, tobacco, pipes, everything we had which they did not possess, so we commenced trading. First was the pony, saddle and sixshooter belonging to Tex. I gave them two dollars in cash, three ten cent packages

of tobacco, the two pipes they had been smoking, and the red silk handkerchief. Blue Eye sat on the ground near me. Without looking up I asked her in French how soon she would be ready to go, but she did not understand; so, while trying to trade for some Navajo blankets, I asked her again in German.

"Two seconds," came the reply. It was now about three o'clock in the afternoon. Tex had saddled his pony and stood holding our horses. We were going to buy the girl if we could, but take her we would, for who with a speck of manhood could leave such a beautiful girl with a band of dirty Sioux Indians? The horses ready, I got up as if to go, and it was then the girl came near getting us into trouble.

"Fearing we were not going to take her," was the only explanation she could give. I left Tex with the horses and walked out through the village, waiting for her to put herself right with the old chief, for he had understood her when she called to me and made a move to follow.

"I forgot my Dutch, too," she said, when I came within hearing.

I wandered back to the chief's headquarters and began bargaining for the girl. At first he only answered me with grunts, so I called the girl to assist. The deal was closed, we giving him all the money we had, Tex handing over his five dollars, our pocket knives and watches. Then Tex wanted a game, but the look I gave him shut off further poker talk.

"Let's go quick," said Blue Eye, again forgetting her Dutch. "There'll be trouble here in a minute."

Just as we turned to go a big buck who had been watching the proceedings made a lunge for the girl, but a tap on the side of the head from my sixshooter sent him sprawling backward in the grass, and away we went down the river, with half a hundred yelling Indians and as many howling dogs after us. Those who started on foot soon gave up the chase, for we were going like the wind; but their ponies were hurriedly run in, and before we were out of sight of the village we could see fifteen or twenty bucks mount their horses and take after us.

"What's the matter with those fellows, Blue Eye?" I asked. "Didn't we buy you from them?"

"Yes, from the old chief, but not from the rest of the tribe. Gray Wolf is probably a 'good Indian' by this time, for I am sure they were going to kill him; but I belong to you. Come, pony, come," she said to her horse, and the pony responded by pushing up into the lead.

"Don't urge him too hard, Blue Eye," said Tex. "He is not as strong as our horses, and may give out with you."

"You will have to trade with me if he does. Come, pony, come."

Tex and I had slowed up a little, but on she went, with her hair and blanket which she wore over her shoulders, flying straight out behind. I took the empty sixshooter we had traded for, loaded it, took a dozen cartridges from my pocket, and placed them in the belt; then pushing up past Tex, I overtook Blue Eye and persuaded her to slow up a little.

" We have better horses than the Indians, and on a straight run they can never catch us. Here," said I, handing her the sixshooter, "should we lose each other in the sand hills before we reach the ranch, you will have something to defend yourself with."

" To kill myself if they capture me," she replied, as she pulled down the flying blanket and buckled the belt around her waist. "Come, pony, come," and on she went.

CHAPTER VIII.

At dusk we reached a small pool of water and stopped for a moment to let the horses drink and to take a sup ourselves, for it was very warm and we were all thirsty. I had brought a little lunch with me, which I unpacked; we all ate a bite, took another drink and started on.

"Boys," said Blue Eye, "you are strangers to me, but I feel that we ought to return thanks. I haven't eaten anything for an age that tasted as good as that sandwich you gave me. Come, pony— Look there! Oh! save me from those red devils! They will kill us sure!"

We stopped our horses, for there only a few rods ahead of us was a small band of Indians coming up the river.

"Don't get excited," said I; "they don't act as if they would harm us."

"Oh, yes, they will. I forgot to tell you that the whole Sioux and Cheyenne tribes go on the warpath tomorrow. Quick, we must get away from here."

We turned south through the sand hills, urging our horses to their utmost speed. We saw the Indians leave the river and knew they intended to head us off, but they soon fell behind. We had outridden them for the first few moments, but now they were gaining on us. There were about twenty in the band, but from their yells one would have thought there was a hundred.

"Damn this country, anyway," said Tex. "It's down one hill and up two."

And it seemed so, for our horses were weakening. When about four miles from the river they opened fire on us, and it was then I felt the first sting of a bullet. I thought my left arm was blown off, but afterward discovered it was only a flesh wound, and that I was not hurt much after all. We did not return the fire, but urged our horses to greater efforts, hoping to tire out their horses and make our escape; but this we could not do, and our case began to look hopeless.

"We will have to stop and fight it out with them," said Blue Eye. "Pony is done for."

We had reached the top of a sand hill, where we quickly dismounted and led our horses down into a blowout. The Indians, thinking we had gone down the hill on the opposite side, rushed on us. It was too dark to shoot accurately, but we kept well down behind the bank, and, as Tex put it, "Poured cold lead into them as fast as we could pull trigger." They retreated; that is a majority of them did, and all was quiet for a few moments.

"Believe they have quit us," said Tex, as he climbed up on the bank to look about.

"Don't you believe it," said Blue Eye. "An Indian who will fight at all never quits as long as there is any fight left in him, and dead Indians are the only ones that *won't* fight."

It had now grown quite dark, but at times we could hear the tread of their horses.

"They are riding in a circle around this blowout," said Blue Eye.

We soon discovered she was right, and that at each round they seemed to be coming a little nearer. We were pretty well protected, however, being on top of the hill. The blowout was eight or ten feet deep, with nearly perpendicular walls, from fifteen to twenty feet wide, and about forty feet long.

Blue Eye was silent for some time; then, coming over so she could whisper to me, said:

"They are guarding us, riding round and round. I think there are ten or twelve of them, and if we do not get out of here before daylight, they will kill us sure."

"You stay here and be perfectly still. Tex and I will crawl out and investigate a little, and then decide what to do. Now remember, Blue Eye, stay here until we return."

My arm was paining me and I was weak from loss of blood, but there was no time to dress wounds. I watched the Indians as they rode round and round the hill, keeping from twenty to thirty rods from the blowout. I had returned to within a few feet of our hiding place, Tex having gone in an opposite direction, when I heard a couple of shots and knew at once he had gone too near the guard line. He came running back, and as he rolled down into the blowout said there was one good Indian on duty out there, and possibly two, and that we would have to sure fight it out with them now. He added that it had to come, so he thought he would take the first fall out of them, and got the one riding the big gray horse, the fellow who shot me in the arm.

But Indians are like flies, two come to take the place of every one killed. They would rush

up near the blowout, fire and retreat, then charge from the other side. This they kept up for about an hour, when we judged from the yells that at least half their number had given up the fight. It had grown darker and darker and commenced to rain.

"Come, now," said I, "we must get out of here. I think they have gone north, so we will go east and endeavor to reach the ranch."

"Come and help me mount," said Tex, "I'm shot through the breast."

"Poor boy!" said Blue Eye. "I'm awfully sorry. I wish we were some place where I could dress your wound. You boys have surely made a good fight."

"You helped some, too, didn't you?" I remarked, as I assisted Tex up out of the blowout.

"Yes, what I could, and I haven't a cartridge left."

I reloaded her sixshooter and we started in what we thought was an easterly direction. We rode slowly for a few moments, having gone perhaps a hundred yards, when the Indians charged the blowout, riding boldly up to the very top of the hill, but we weren't there. A flash of lightning revealed our presence, however, and down they came. The ground was too full of holes to ride very fast, and they were firing as they came. Blue Eye's horse was killed, but in an instant she was up behind me, holding onto me with one hand and firing back at them with the other. After a running fight of perhaps a mile, in which Tex and I joined occasionally, we stopped shooting and turned sharply to the left, hoping to reach the river. Our pursuers rode on easterly, and

there were only three or four of them left. Although we did not know where we were going, we did not care much, provided they would keep on in an opposite direction. We had ridden eight or ten miles since we made our turn. The clouds had broken and the moon came up, not in the east but in the southwest. We were all sure of that.

"Ever see the moon rise there?" asked Tex, as he dismounted and threw himself on the ground. Realizing we were lost and had been riding away from the ranch seemed to discourage him.

"Go on and leave me," said he. "If you get to the ranch just tell the boys I put up a good fight."

"Poor fellow!" said Blue Eye. "And to think it was all on my account."

"There, now," said Tex, "no more of that. If I was sure you would escape I would die without a murmur. There, that is better," he said to me as I raised his head so it would rest on my knee.

"Oh, for a drink of water! Can't you get me a drink? It's daylight now, for I can see the sun. Yes, the morning is coming. She is shooting sunbeams at the disappearing night. See! See! She is gathering the stars and hiding them in her bosom, and will not release them until darkness has come again. Look out! Look out! Here they come." And he fired a shot at the moon, which was shining brightly on his face.

"Oh! for a drink. I will die of thirst. Can't I have a drink?"

But we could make no reply. We would have gladly given all we possessed for a cup of water

for him, but none was to be had. It is sad enough to sit by the side of a dying friend when one has done something to relieve his suffering, but to watch with one begging and pleading as he did is an experience I hope to never have again.

"It's evening of a dark day here, but morning of a bright and glorious day over there. Oh! if the light of the morning will only last forever. A cup of water. Just a sup. Please give me a drink."

I closed his eyes and walked over to the girl, who was weeping as though her heart would break, for she knew the end had come. She arose as I approached her, took me by the hand, and we walked back and knelt by the side of our dead friend. I could think of but one thing to do, and that was to tie the body onto his horse, old Buck, and make another effort to get out of the hills. Wolves were coming closer and closer, and it would not do to shoot them, lest the Indians might again find us. We had scarcely started before a pack of those hungry monsters, not coyotes, but big grays, ran to the spot where the body had lain, and fought and howled, as they smelled the blood.

"Where are you taking me?" said the girl, as I started to follow old Buck, who seemed to be going in the wrong direction with Tex's body.

"That horse knows more about these hills than you or I, and we are going to follow him," I replied.

"Perhaps he does. I'm sorry I spoke so rudely. Forgive me, won't you?"

"Certainly; but please keep quiet."

The next two or three hours were, I think, the most dreary and trying of any I ever experienced. I was weak from loss of blood, wet to the skin, and, as I thought, dying of hunger and thirst. After the wolves quit following us, we walked to rest the horse. Muggins was getting leg weary and I wanted to save him all I could, so we trudged on. Would we ever find water? We could talk of nothing else. I ran my hand into one of the pockets of my canteenas to get some cartridges to refill my belt, and found some sandwiches. I gave one to Blue Eye, but neither of us could eat, so I put them back. Were you ever so thirsty you could not eat? If so, you know how we suffered.

A faint light began to show in the east. This gave us hope, for I knew we were traveling in the right direction, but how far it was to the river I did not know. The word river may seem out of place, but in those days we called it a river, even though it was sixty miles to running water. Here and there were only small pools, or holes of water, and in some instances these were many miles apart. The sun was about an hour high when we came to one of them. We lay down upon the sand and drank, and drank, and drank.

CHAPTER IX.

I unsaddled Muggins and turned him out to graze awhile, for we were too tired to go on. I had three sandwiches left, so we each ate one, and I gave the other to the horse. He had carried both of us nearly all night, and I felt he had earned part of the lunch. We took another drink, then climbed to the top of a little sand hill and sat down. From there we could see over the entire valley, and as we did not want to be caught by the Indians, kept a close watch of every moving thing.

"How far do you think it is to the ranch where you are taking me?" said Blue Eye, as she moved around so she faced me. "I want to sit so I can see in the opposite direction. The Indians might slip up behind us. What do you see?" she asked.

"Nothing startling, but if you will keep watch I will go over there and see what that buzzard has found."

I did so, and there lay the remains of the half of the antelope Tex and I had left the day before. I could scarcely wait to tell the girl the good news, for I now knew where we were, and that we would soon be at the ranch. I started back, but she knew I was pleased with the discovery, and came down the hill to meet me.

"In three hours, Blue Eye, you will see a very dear friend. Let's go back to the top of the

hill and rest a few moments longer while Muggins feeds."

"What did you mean? Who will I see—Tobe? No, it can't be him. He's dead. Did you ever know anyone by the name of Tobe Tobias?"

"Yes, but I don't know where he is now."

Knowing the Indians had come up the river the day before, I feared the boys at the ranch might have been killed or driven away and the ranch house burned, so I thought best not to tell her anything about her brother.

"Now," said I, "tell me who you are and how long you have been with the Indians."

"Well, now who am I? I wish you might tell me. I'm called Blue Eye, but my name is Nellie Tobias. I was born on the old farm down in Kentucky eighteen years ago. My eldest brother, Tobe, came west about five years ago, and when we decided to come he wrote us to ship to Kit Carson and he would meet us there, but he never came. Perhaps he did not get our letter. We arrived there a year ago last September, and waited a week for the car which contained our household effects and a couple of wagons. We knew that Tobe was on the Arickaree river somewhere, so father bought a couple of teams at the Barteld's ranch and we started on the long journey overland. We reached the south fork of the Republican, and were camped near the Tuttle ranch when the Indians captured us, killing my father and younger brother, and carrying my sister, mother and myself away. Where they took us we never knew. My sister Nora only lived a few weeks, and my mother died about

four months ago. I had just returned from her grave when you boys came yesterday. God alone knows what I have suffered—dragged about from place to place, half starved a greater part of the time, and nearly killed by exposure. I have often tried to escape, but always got caught. I have seen a dozen white men, perhaps, since I was captured, but none who I thought would treat me as a girl should be treated, except, of course, you and Tex. I could have fallen in love with that boy; but oh! such a gambler. A true southern gentleman, a little slow to act, but he kept his promise to help me away. Poor boy! I'm so sorry he was killed on my account. Since my mother died I have feared I would go insane. During all those long, weary months we were never out of each other's sight. We had a separate tepee, and the Indians never came about us, except when the old chief and one of his wives came with him. Since my mother was taken away an old squaw has lived with me."

"Glad to get away, then?" said I, in an effort to cheer her up, for I could see she was about to break down.

"I certainly was, and if I had gotten hold of you when you were at the village a few days ago I would have choked you."

"Yes?"

"Yes, because you made no effort to get me away."

"I didn't know you wanted to leave the Indians till Tex told me, and you know the rest."

"Yes, and I owe my life to you. Tex didn't know how to plan, and was too slow to act if he had known. Even yesterday he wanted to play

cards with those Indians, and they going on the warpath after one more sleep. Oh! I pity the whites now, for the Sioux and the Cheyennes, two of the most treacherous tribes of American Indians when donned out with war paint and feathers, have sworn vengeance against them."

"You may finish the story some other time, Blue Eye, for we will now start down the river and endeavor to reach the ranch. If the Indians have killed the boys and burned the buildings, we will try to get fresh horses and go on. I hope you won't get discouraged, for I feel we will find friends down the river somewhere."

Muggins was tired, so we walked and led him three or four miles. We then mounted, but had ridden only a short distance when we rounded a slight bend in the river and came in sight of the ranch. The horse saw the buildings as soon as we, neighed loudly, and broke into a long, swinging gallop.

The hundred miles or more we had ridden him the past twenty-eight hours, carrying double part of the time, as he was now doing, had told on him, but there was a good long ride left in him yet. He never slacked his pace until we dismounted at the pasture gate, a few yards from the house.

Old Buck had reached the ranch with his dead rider several hours ahead of us, and the boys were watching for me as well as for Indians.

Tobe and Speck came running out to meet us. I reached out to shake hands with them, then turning, introduced Tobe to his sister.

It was several seconds before they recognized each other or realized who the other was, for they had long since mourned each other as dead.

"Blue Eye, my sister?"

"Tobe, is it you?"

Well, I just joined in the fond embrace and mingled my tears with theirs. Speck looked on in silence for a few moments, then turned to go back to the house. He did not seem to realize that brother and sister had met after a separation of many years, and could not share their joy at that time.

"Glad to see us, aren't you, Speck?" I said to him a few moments later.

"Vell, yas, I tink I vas. I pin somepody's darling, too, vonce alretty, und ve not make out some boo hoo like dot, I dunno," and he led Muggins away and turned him out.

The sight of Tex's body as we entered the house brought back the horrors of the night before. As soon as we could we told Tobe and Speck of our wild ride, the hiding place in the blowout, and how bravely poor Tex had fought.

Speck had stepped out into the yard to brush away the tears, but soon came in and reached for his Winchester.

"Injuns! Injuns! Dey vas coomin' mit der ranch. Kevick, und ve got ter make der velcome diser'greeble, aind it?"

We looked out and could see a small band of Indians about half a mile away. They had stopped and were evidently holding a council of war, so we barred the doors and prepared to defend ourselves. With the glasses I could see they were painted, and knew that murder was in their hearts.

The ranch buildings were located in the northwest corner of the pasture, and we knew they

could not approach us except from the north and west. For an hour or more we waited for an attack. They rode to the north and then turned back, making a half circle, from the fence east of us to the fence south. Each round they came a little nearer, riding down on the further side of their ponies, with their heads low enough to look under the animals' necks. We saw other Indians come down the river and join them. Each round they came closer and closer. Their chief, decked out with great strings of beads and feathers, and riding a fine, big roan horse, charged up to within a hundred yards of us, slapped himself on the breast, then turned and rode away. Speck grew furious, and Blue Eye was as anxious as Speck to take a shot at him.

"Don't be in a hurry," said I, "you may need your cartridges before this is over. There are at least fifty of them and but four of us. Let them fire first, and I will then tell you when to shoot."

We had not long to wait. Even while I was admonishing them to be patient a bullet came crashing through the window. No one was hurt, but for the next hour the yelling of that band of Indians was frightful.

The north and west walls of the house were built of sod, so we had nothing to fear except when looking out through the window. I had watched their actions as closely as possible from the window on the west side of the house, and was hoping they would use up all their ammunition at long range; but not so. They came closer and closer, and were only about sixty yards from us when we opened fire on them. I saw the big chief fall from his horse, but in an instant another

Indian had mounted the big roan, leaving his own pony to gallop away across the sand hills. After a round or two Speck went out, and standing at the corner of the house worked his Winchester to his heart's content.

It was nearly noon when what was left of that treacherous band rode away, going south through the sand hills, taking the wounded, but leaving a dozen good Indians behind.

"I neffer feel so goot since der mornin' in der Cottinvood gulch, I dunno," remarked Speck, as he came in and commenced cleaning his rifle.

"Enjoy the fight, Speck?" asked Blue Eye.

"Yessum. I feel goot alvays sometimes, I dunno, ven I kill some dogs, aind it? Vill dey coom pack some more alretty yet?"

"I think not. They will probably go on south and join the main band on the Big Sandy. Do you know where that is? Oh, Speck! There is that big roan horse. See if you can catch him for me. Look! He is coming towards the ranch."

Speck did as he was bid, and as he came leading the animal up to the house, said:

"Plue Eye, I make you some bresents mit dot hoss und saddles."

"Thank you, Speck. You are a good boy."

Tobe and I had taken a sup of brandy, then prepared the noonday meal and called Speck and Blue Eye.

"Why, Tobe, can you cook? You couldn't boil water without burning the kettle when I knew you last," and Tobe looked at his sister as if he wanted to reprimand her.

"Never min' now, jis' start right in, an' if thar's not 'nough here we'll git more. Ain't had a square meal lately, hev ye?"

"No, but I had forgotten all about being hungry lately; there has been too much worry and excitement."

After our appetites were satisfied I enjoyed a smoke, then lay down for an hour's sleep and rest.

"We're ready t' bury Tex now," said Tobe, as he woke me, "an' thought ye'd like t' be present."

I got up, changed my clothes, had Blue Eye re-bind my sore arm, and when all was ready the girl read a chapter from the little testament she had carried all those weary months she had been a prisoner of the Indians. She then led the way across the river, we following with the body. She read another chapter, and Tex (we knew no other name for him) was laid to rest.

Tobe and Speck then went out and buried the Indians that had been killed in the fight.

CHAPTER X.

We decided that the climate was more healthful down at the home ranch, and at once loaded all our valuables into three wagons, rounded up the horses, and the next morning bade goodbye to scenes about the Meadows.

The trip was made without incident, we reaching home about noon the third day. They were all glad to see us, but had heard nothing of the Indian uprising.

"What's the matter?" asked Dan, as he came out to meet us. "Altitude too high up there?"

When I had explained briefly what had happened he nearly shook my arm off.

"God bless you," said he. "I am glad you got out of there. Who's the girl?"

"That's is Tobe's sister. I rescued her from a band of Sioux Indians a few days ago."

"You are welcome here, miss," said Dan, holding his hat over his stomach, making his best bow, after I had introduced him. "This whole ranch is yours. Just take possession. But I thought you were dead?"

"I have been for several months; yes, even worse than dead, for, as it was, I suffered all the horrors of death many times."

"Now, we are expecting company," continued the foreman, "and it's about time for the teams to return. We'll go in the house and get things

straightened around. Glad you got back, Tobe, for none of the boys can cook like you can."

"Who is it, Dan?" asked Tobe, not at all pleased at having company before he could scrub and scour the kitchenware. "Down easters?"

"Well, yes, from Chicago. There's Major Chump and wife, General Ab Clark, wife and daughter, and a few more who have no handles to their names. I think there are nine in the party. They are going to invest in cattle, and either buy a ranch or locate one before they return."

"That'll do," said Tobe, as he started for the kitchen, followed by Blue Eye.

"What will I do?" said the girl. "Look at these clothes of mine! I won't stay, now that's all there is to it. You'll have to take me away."

"Clo'es nothin'. They'll think ye're r'mantic. We'll explain it all, so there, now."

"Hide me! Take me away! There they are out there now.

"Shore 'nough! Well, 't's no use t' run. Jis' look pleasant like. Sorter's ef yer goin' t' have yer pictur' took, an' mebbe they'll give ye one o' their dresses. Purty tony folks, all right."

Dan and I went out to meet them.

"You see," said the major, "we didn't overlook anyone. We are all here," and he introduced us to each of the party. The baggage was unloaded and carried in, and all were made to feel at home. I persuaded Blue Eye to come out of the kitchen, and, after introducing her to the ladies, told them where I had found her and asked if they could spare some of their clothing.

I started to apologize, but Mrs. Clark motioned to me to return to the kitchen.

"Clothes! Why bless you, my child, you can have half the clothes we brought with us. Now, tell the boys not a bite to eat until six o'clock. We came out west to rough it awhile, so no favors for us. Be sure and tell them." And Blue Eye came in to deliver the message.

Well, Tobe and I hardly knew her. She was handsome in her Indian dress, but now her figure was the embodiment of grace and feminine charm. I had learned to love her, and to see her dressed the way I had been accustomed to seeing girls, she appeared more beautiful to me than ever. Of medium size, large, brown eyes, and long, wavy, black hair.

For a week or more everything was lovely. No Indian scare, long rides along the river, in which the girls usually joined. The major found the climate as good as he expected. A little too hot, pretty dry, too much wind, rather bracing, but too much alkali; in fact, nothing just suited him. Mrs. Chump spent most of her time with the major, trying to get him to admit that everything was just lovely. She was very precise herself, and while she did not approve of the long rides and romps the other members took, she would have been glad to join in them instead of staying around the ranch. Then, too, the boys might have played some joke on the major if they got him out of her sight, and besides, the major suffered with what the boys called the "heaves," and nothing but the spirit of the yellow corn would relieve him when the attacks came on. He often had forty spells a day, so we never got

him farther than the river—the swimming hole, as we called it, about half a mile from the ranch.

The river was about two hundred feet wide and from six to eighteen inches deep, except the swimming hole, which was from two to six feet deep. The water was as clear as crystal, the banks and bed sandy, making an ideal bathing place. So the ladies finally decided they would go to the "beach" for an afternoon. It was an exclusive party, and all the boys were notified. When all was ready I went out and hitched up old Selam, piled in the grips, opened the pasture gate, and, as they drove through, told them to drop the bridle rein and Selam would stand.

"Oh, we know how to make a cow horse stand," said Mrs. Clark, as they drove off. "Just drop the rein. We will be back in time for dinner."

They drove down behind a little sand bank, stopped old Selam at the edge of the water and hung their clothes—not on a hickory limb, but on the buggy. It was an extremely hot afternoon, and they were enjoying themselves immensely.

"Fine, isn't it?" said Mrs. Clark.

"Perfectly lovely," replied the other members of the party.

"Let's wade a little farther down," suggested Mrs. Shore.

They had forgotten old Selam, also to drop the bridle rein, and when the horse discovered this he turned about, recrossed the river and came back up to the ranch. The horse and buggy were not missed until time to come home, and there they were; so all commenced to yell. Tobe and I went out to the pasture gate, thinking Selam

had ran away and thrown them out, but soon discovered what was the matter. Their clothes were in the buggy. We called Speck and asked him to drive back and see the ladies home. He drove straight towards them, as instructed, instead of crossing at the ford, for this would have brought him in plain sight of them a couple of hundred yards distant, and also in plain view of the ranch. They were down behind the river bank, which was about two feet high at that point, and Speck had driven up to within about thirty yards of them before they realized their predicament. Then they all commenced to talk at once. The boy stopped.

"Go back there, you speckled face Dutchman. How dare you, sir?" said Mrs. Chump.

"Come on, Speck," called Mrs. Clark. "We have to have our clothes. Clinging Mother Hubbards wont' scare you."

"Shut your eyes! Blindfold yourself!" were Mrs. Beverly's instructions.

"Oh, if he were a blind man, or if it were dark, we might get out of here."

"Stay there, Speck!"

"Come on, Speck!"

"Drive down this way farther."

"No, don't you do it. Go back that way."

"No, come straight on."

"Send the horse on and you go back."

"Come on, Speck, we have to have our clothes."

"How dare you (wo-o Selam) come any nearer?"

When all had yelled themselves hoarse, Speck asked:

"Now vhat you vant, I dunno. Ven you say go pack, und I shtart, you call me some more, aind it? Ven I kume close by, you say go avay, und I no make him oudt. You haf der Selam afraid mit a skare, und he like to run avay und shcatter der dresses mit der ranch. Ven you vant some pettico'ts und vat you call him, you vill find him mit der grass, und I go pack py der ranch vonce yet."

CHAPTER XI.

Dinner was waiting when the swimming party returned.

"I hope you ladies enjoyed the evening," said the general, when all had been seated around the table.

"Just splendid," replied his wife. "We feel so refreshed."

"What was the matter with old Selam? I heard you had a runaway."

"We didn't. We just forgot something, but that was all in the play. Nothing serious has happened, and we are all here and will be ready for a jaunt tomorrow."

Mrs. Chump was growing so serious that Mrs. Clark changed the conversation to buffalo, and asked if we couldn't arrange a hunting trip. The meal was finished just as a bunch of riders came in, bringing news of Indian depredations on the Republican.

"No hunting trip for me," said one of the girls, and the rest of the ladies shrugged their shoulders. Mrs. Chump thought the Indians were being persecuted.

"But, really, I would like to kill a buffalo," said Mrs. Clark.

"I'd rather kill an Indian," said Blue Eye; and Mrs. Chump was so shocked she could scarcely contain herself.

"You wicked girl! Commit murder! The poor Indians should be protected, and when I re-

turn home I shall tell our church to send missionaries out here to preach to the heathen. Oh, dear! How the poor Indians must suffer at the hands of the ignorant whites. I wish a preacher would come out here and convert the people of this country, so they would stop killing the poor, innocent Indians."

"Oh, never mind the Indians," put in the major. "This weather is just horrible."

"What's the matter now?" asked Mrs. Shore.

"Matter! Too hot, and dry, and dusty, and—"

"There now, major," said his wife, "that will do. You are a little grouchy, and if you get started to fussing you never know when to stop. Come, let's all go out into the yard; its cooler out there. Look, there is another rider coming."

"It's old Deacon Boreus," said the foreman. "The converting of the heathen can commence right away," and he smiled at the boys as he turned to go out to the corrals.

The deacon was known all over the country as the tramp preacher. He never missed a meal or paid a cent, and owed every rider from the Platte to the Arkansas for borrowed money—that is, everyone who would lend to him—but claimed he had paid them in prayers. He was about as welcome, therefore, as a boil on the back of the neck.

"Gawd bless you, my friends, Gawd bless you," was the way he greeted us as he dismounted and went the rounds shaking hands with all he could get in reach of. "Such a pleasant evening. Such a pleasant evening. When I eat a bite we will have services. A long time I don't see

ladies in this country, an' now's my chance to preach to them. W'y howdy, Tobe, howdy; how's your father?"

"He's still dead," replied Tobe, with as little concern as possible.

"Dead, w'y yes; how stupid of me to forget. To forget. But the Lord loveth a cheerful giver. Could I have a bite too eat? I'm powerful hungry. Gawd will bless you for all you do for his servant. I will return thanks, though there is little bread for his people."

"So glad a minister is to be with us," said Mrs. Chump.

"I don't believe he knows much," said Mrs. Beverly.

"No, and the boys don't like him a bit, do they, Speck?" And Mrs. Clark nodded her head, so the boy knew he must answer in the affirmative.

"He peen too pig a ted peet alretty," replied Speck. "Peg der poys mit some monies oudt, und he no pay him pack, aind it?"

"He's a dear, good man and a Christian gentleman, and I am so glad he came," said Mrs. Chump, again taking the deacon's part.

Thus ran the conversation until the deacon finished his dinner. When he came out he took a chair near Mrs. Chump, led in the conversation, borrowed ten dollars of the good lady, then announced that services would begin with prayer. He then talked for an hour, read a chapter, used a few misfit quotations, and closed the services by announcing that he would take for his text the next evening the third verse of the first chapter

of Job. The next day was a dreary one for the girls.

"Oh, I wish he would leave," said Mrs. Clark. "We didn't come out here to get religion; we are here for a holiday, a good time."

"Certainly," said Blue Eye, "and I don't propose to wear a long face, even though a preacher is here. Let's not go. Let him preach if he wants to. We don't have to hear him."

It was about three o'clock when I came in from a long ride up the river. Around in the shade of the house I saw the major and the deacon. Both were talking at once, with no regard for what the other was saying. The major had had a severe attack of the "heaves," and, being contagious, the deacon had caught them and was relieving himself from the major's bottle. I got hold of the deacon's bible, and with a little paste and some clippings fixed the text as it should read for such as he, then told the general to see that all his crowd was present at services that night and I would look after the boys. I walked the deacon awhile to sober him up, and told him what a nice illustration he could make with a walnut, the shell to represent the sinners, the kernel the righteous. This pleased him greatly, so he asked me to get him a walnut, which I did. Old trick I had heard, but it worked nicely.

"You believe every word in your bible, do you not?" I asked.

"Certainly, certainly; every word, every word."

Promptly at the given time the deacon opened the services by singing "Jesus Is Calling to Me," then prayed until out of breath, and words, too.

He then gave a short talk on the evils of intemperance. Next came the text, which he read as follows:

"His substance also was seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels and five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred she asses, and I may be of this last herd."

"Amen!" shouted the major. "A great truth has been spoken."

The deacon stopped, cleared his throat, wiped his glasses, and read the text again.

"Now, my dear friends, that's Gawd's own language, just as recorded in my own bible. I have read that before, and chose it as a text because it related to stock, and since we all deal in stock, it must be very appropriate. I will read on:

"And this herd multiplied greatly, and all were not quadrupeds."

"Amen" again shouted the major. "Another great truth."

"Gawd's own language, just as recorded in my own bible. I will read still another verse.

"Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. And damned if I don't believe that."

"So do I," said the major.

"It's Gawd's own language, and I believe every word of this book."

"Well, your congregation believes all you have read tonight, deacon; can't you give us a few more verses?"

"Well—er, yes. I could go on, but I am wandering too far from my text. I was to talk to you of Job's flocks. Now, Job was a very pious

and patient man and owned great herds. I must illustrate to you the difference between Job and his people and those who were ungodly. I have here an English walnut. This outside shell represents the sinner, a class to which my cowboy friends belong. They are going down to perdition as fast as the unlocked wheels of eternity can roll them. They are damned because they will not come to us and be saved. Now, we come to the good part, the kernel, which is as we Christians, pure and holy, good, just like this—"

He had opened the walnut, and out rolled a big, fat grub worm. He mopped his brow, picked up his bible and hat and left, the service coming to an end.

"Major," said Mrs. Chump, "do you know who did that?"

"Did what?"

"Why, fixed, changed, er—d-done something to the deacon's text. It's awful, dreadful! What won't these people do out here, anyway?"

"Oh, I reckon it's not so bad; the deacon said he believed all he read, and I'm sure I do."

The next morning at daybreak the deacon was seen riding off down the river. For several days Mrs. Chump kept asking those about the ranch if the deacon had left her ten dollars with them.

"He surely left it with someone," said she, "for he only wanted it a day or two."

CHAPTER XII.

The riders had commenced returning to the ranch, where they would be safer. The first roundup was over and the second one had to be abandoned on account of the Indians. Each day we could hear of the killing of some settler or the burning of someone's home, so there seemed nothing we could do but prepare for them when they should turn back north.

But a gang of cowboys never borrow trouble; they are afraid they cannot pay it back. Uncle Jimmy, the oldest inhabitant, came home, not that he was afraid of Indians, but because he wanted to rest his horses. Tomato Charley, Milt, Trig, Walter, Harry and a half dozen boys from the Platte came next, and things were lively for a few days, notwithstanding the danger ahead. Every one was happy except the major, Mrs. Chump and Uncle Jimmy. The "heaves" grew worse with the major. He didn't like the cooking, the weather was too hot, the ranch houses weren't built right; nothing suited him. Mrs. Chump was so sorry for the Indians she became disagreeable, but the boys were courteous and gentlemanly. No matter what happened or was supposed to have happened, Uncle Jimmy had always seen or heard of something a litle worse. Milt was the champion cornet player of the state; gave up a position that paid him handsomely because he loved outdoor life. Harry could speak seven languages, was capable of teaching five, but

rode the range as a matter of choice. Trig was a graduate of Oberlin and Walter a lawyer. I mention the qualifications of these for the reason that many people think the majority (some would say all) of cowboys are ignorant. Tomato Charley never went to "skule," but was somewhat of a philosopher. "Take chances; th' shore things air all roped an' branded." "Ye can't tell how big th' front door uv a barn is by lookin' at th' back side." "Don't bet too much on one pair; there's a heap uv other cyards in th' deck." "Never speak diserspec'ful uv a lady; she might hev a brother bigger'n you," and many other similar expressions were at his tongue's end.

We had just finished our noonday meal the second day after the boys reached home when two riders were seen coming up the river, urging their horses to their utmost speed. All was excitement for a few moments, but when they rode up we saw Nigger Sam, the horsebreaker, from Burntwood, was just having a little fun with a tenderfoot.

"Yassah, yassah, dars injuns comin' shore," and the fellow with him was scared almost out of his wits. He didn't know which he feared most, Indians or cowboys.

"Hevin' a little fun 'ith thet feller, Sam?" asked Tobe, as he came out of the kitchen to see what was going on.

"Yassah, an' Ise laft mahsef sick, sah. I wus jis' comin' t' see 'bout matters ober yer, an' I met dis yer feller. Yaw, yaw, yaw. Seen 'im hidin' out. Yaw, yaw, yaw. An' he done tole me 'bout bein' in de big Injun fight down on Big Sandy, an' how many he done killed all by hissef, an' I

knowed he wus jis' too tender fer dis yer worl', an' I commenced talkin' 'bout Injuns an' cowboys, an'—yaw, yaw, yaw. Well, sah, I like t' run mah hoss to def keepin' up to 'im, an'—"

"Here! Help! Help!"

We all ran out and found Rube had gone into the wrong corral in his effort to hide, and hung himself up on an old Texas cow's horns. She had pinned him up against the sod wall, and was doing all in her power to make his visit pleasant—to her. We rescued him, and the boys charged him two and a half for their trouble. He climbed up on top of the stable to look for Indians, but was finally persuaded to come down and get something to eat.

"Now, Rube," said Tomato Charley, "we don't 'low ye've come hyar t' sponge, so ye'll help 'ith th' chores. First ye'll ride old Selam t' water, an' I'll help ye."

Selam was saddled and the back cinch drawn so tight that the old horse bucked him off. Then the ducks had to be driven up, and after keeping the fellow in the river for an hour, he was told that the ducks would have to stay out. "They don't 'pear t' want t' come in, nohow."

We had a buffalo calf staked down in the pasture, a big, stout fellow about four months old, and Charley told Rube he must feed the "Pole Ang's" calf. They got a pail of skimmed milk and started off.

"Ever teach a calf ter drink milk, Rube?"

"Oh, yes; I'm no tenderfoot. Been west a long time. I act like an oldtimer, don't I?"

"Yas, jis' like one. I know'd ye wus a-puttin' uv th' scare on all th' time. Ye're jis' like

an ol' han'. Now, here's a thor'bred Pole Ang's calf what we're a-weanin', an' ye mus' teach 'im t' drink milk. If 'e don't drink at firs', jis' push 'is nose in th' bucket an' hol' it there till 'e swallers. Now go up to 'im."

The calf had gone as far as the sixty-foot stake rope would let him, stood there with head down and neck bowed. Rube walked up to him, and, holding the bucket with one hand, pushed the calf's head down into the milk with the other. Of course, this was all new to the calf, so it gave a bawl, jumped forward, butted Rube in the stomach, knocked him over and came near drowning him with the milk. When he tried to get up the calf butted him over again and jumped on him. Rube was anxious to get to the ranch. He crawled and rolled and ran when he could, the calf following the full length of the rope. He crawled on his hands and feet the last twenty or thirty feet, and when finally out of reach of the calf go up to look himself over. He was covered with milk and dirt, and his clothes were torn into strips.

"Ye done well, Rube, firs' rate. Never see a feller 'at could furnish a calf so much 'musement as ye kin an' look so pleasin' like. Yer never kin tell th' length uv a stake rope till it's stretched out. Enjoy it 's well 's th' calf did, Rube?"

"Ask the calf," said Rube, and he crawled through the wire fence and went back to the corrals.

All had enjoyed the fun immensely. General and Mrs. Clark took a deep interest in everything that was doing, and the girls thought the show better than a circus.

Blue Eye was so happy at having made good her escape from the Indians that she could scarcely believe things were real. Then, too, she had found Tobe, her brother, she had so long mourned as dead.

"Oh, if this life I'm living now would only last forever," she remarked to me that evening while we were out for a ride. "Such gentlemanly boys and such a sweet girl as Miss Clark. And Tobe here, too. Why, I really feel as if I were somebody—not an Indian, after all." And she turned her head to hide a blush. I made no reply, so she continued:

"Will you do me a favor? I want to know something."

"Very well," I replied. "What is it?"

"Roany, this fine, big horse Speck caught for me, is mine to keep, is he?"

"Yes, I think the Indians stole him; but if I can find the owner I will pay for the horse and you can keep him."

"Well, he's such a kind old fellow, and I enjoy riding him so much, I would hate to give him up."

"Is that all?"

"No. I haven't asked you what I intended to at all. Say, will you tell me? I want to know how much you paid for me. How much did you give old Gray Wolf?"

"You helped make the bargain, didn't you?"

"Yes, but I was so excited that I forgot to keep account."

"You must have some idea, for you told us that we gave all you were worth. And it doesn't matter, anyway. You do not owe me anything, if

it's a matter of dollars and cents you are asking about. I hope you will never feel under any obligation to me for what little I have done for you."

"What little! Risked your life, didn't you?"

"I did only what any of the boys here at the ranch would have done; but let's not talk of that. You know we are going to the sand hills tomorrow to hunt buffalo, so we must—"

"I won't talk of hunting. I'm curious."

"All women are, I believe."

"Aren't men?"

"I presume they are to a certain extent, but I'll tell you if you ever get me out of bondage, or ever buy me, I won't be particular about the facts. We'll just allow that you got the worst of the bargain and let it go at that."

"Do you want me to say that?"

"Just around that hill is where we will leave the river tomorrow, then ride north and out into the hills above the headwaters of the little creek. I feel sure there are buffalo out there," I replied, in an effort to change the subject. "It's nearly sundown, and I think we had better return to the ranch. Here comes Miss Clark and Tobe, and we must go back with them."

"Remember, you haven't told me what you paid yet."

"Well, I will sometime, if you are really curious to know. Come on now, wake up that old plowhorse or it will be dark before we get home."

"Old plowhorse! Roany, did you hear that? Come! We won't ride with him." And away they went, leaving me far behind. When we

reached the ranch Roany was eating a pan of dry bread.

Tobe and Miss Clark had seen Blue Eye leave me and were anxious to know what was the matter.

"I hope they haven't quarreled. They are both just as nice as can be, and everything is so lovely here. Why, it would just spoil our visit if they were to fall out."

"He's ben teasin' her agin, prob'ly 'bout her hoss," said Tobe. "They won't quarrel, don't be afered o' that."

"Called you an old plowhorse, didn't he, Roany?" said Blue Eye, as we rode up, "and we just ran off and left him. Wait, now, till I get you some sugar for the last piece of bread."

We were returning from the pasture after putting out the horses when we saw Rube coming down the hill yelling "Indians!" Following him a few yards came Tomato Charley with a red blanket over his head. Rube never looked back, jumped the wire fence, plunged into the river, waded out on the opposite side and made for the sand hills, where he slept that night.

"Haven't you had enough fun with that fellow yet?" asked Mrs. Clark. "We have laughed until we are nearly sick, but I fear he will take cold if he sleeps out, wet and thinly clad as he is."

"Well, he's not fit ter be 'round. He come t' th' roundup an' sponged 'while, tol' us 'bout 'is bravery an' stole ever'thing he could git 'is han's on; took ten dollars out o' my war bag one mornin', an' I'm tryin' t' git even."

"The show has been worth that much to us already."

"Will there be another performance tomorrow?"

"Yas, if 'e comes back. Ye see, ye kin sometimes git more fun fer yer money if tother feller spends it than ye kin t' spend it yerself, so I reckon there'll be some more uv it tomorrie."

"How much fun some people want for ten dollars," said Mrs. Shore, sympathetically.

Plans were then made for the buffalo hunt. Nigger Sam sang a few of his best songs, the general, a pastmaster in the art of story telling, entertained us with reminiscences until a late hour, then all retired.

CHAPTER XIII.

All were up bright and early the next morning making ready for the hunt.

Rube had returned sometime during the night, had taken his horse and bade us good-bye while we slept.

The major awoke with the "heaves," but Uncle Jimmy had seen a man who had them worse.

The riders, who had stopped a day with us, bade us good morning and started to their respective ranches.

The horses were brought up and saddled, and we were off for a buffalo hunt, each carrying a little lunch and a bottle of water tied somewhere about his saddle.

Blue Eye and I took the lead, followed by General Clark and wife, Tobe, Tomato Charley and Miss Clark, with Sam and Speck in the rear.

"The rest of us will keep ranch," said Mrs. Beverly, as we rode away. "It's going to be too hot for us to go out today, anyway."

Sam's horse, a fine, big chestnut sorrel, but not very well broken, bolted and commenced to buck, and we saw as pretty an exhibition of broncho riding as we had ever seen. Sam seemed as much at ease as though he were in a rocking chair. While the horse was bucking the hardest—and he was doing a good job of it, too—Sam lighted a cigarette and went puffing away as though the horse were walking.

" Could you do that, general?" asked his wife, as we turned back into the trail and headed up the river.

" No, and if it pleases the boys who select my horses for me when we go out riding, I'll never try it."

I pointed out the government monument, and we turned and rode around it.

" There," said Tobe, "out o' one state, through two more, an' back ag'in into th 'state we started from in two seconds. Any uv y'u ever do that afore?"

The comments on the climate of the different states were varied as we pushed on. After an hour's ride we turned north through the sand hills and the hunt began. There was no trail, so we all rode abreast. After a chase of a couple of miles, a gray wolf was roped and shot. We had sighted a small herd of buffalo and had changed our course that we might approach them from behind a sand hill, situated some distance to the west. As we rode up to the top of the hill from the easterly side we saw Indians about a mile away riding up a similar hill from the northwest. We dismounted and led our horses back a few rods, then, keeping down well out of sight, watched them as they continued their journey toward the river. They were traveling southwest, and to reach the ranch the shortest way we would go southeast. Blue Eye took the field glasses, watched the Indians a few moments, then turning to me, said:

" We must get out of here. I have been with the Indians enough to know that this band is out

for murder. They are vicious and would scalp us in a moment if they caught us."

Knowing we had not been discovered, we started down a little draw that led back to the river and reached the ranch in safety.

"Where's yer buffalo?" asked Uncle Jimmy.

"We sighted some all right," said the general, "and we sighted something else, too, so we just concluded we didn't like buffalo meat, anyway."

"Th' meat's mighty nice, too," said Charley. "Fine; but ye can't mos' allus tell jis' how good buffalo meat is till ye kill th' buffalo."

We had just finished our noonday meal when old Deacon Boreus rode up, asked one of the boys to turn out his horse, and walked in, greeting all with his usual, "Howdy, howdy, boys; how's all the folks, an' Tobe, how's yer father?"

"I tol' ye 'bout forty times," replied Tobe, "thet father's dead. Wall, he's dead yit."

"So you have. How stupid of me to forget—to forget. And how's the major and Sister Chump? W'y you all look like the country agrees with you. Too much worldliness, though, I fear, and we must have divine services tonight."

"Will you preach from the same text you did when here last?" asked the general.

"W'y—er no. Some ungodly person who hath not the fear of the Lord in his soul changed my bible."

"But you said you believed all you had read."

"Yes, just so. But that was a false statement —I mean the text; I didn't read right. But I must be excused till I eat my dinner. I must

eat, ye know, to keep my strength up, so I can preach better."

As the deacon got up to leave the table Tomato Charley came in and greeted the old preacher cordially.

"Deacon," said he, "I've got a r'ligis fit, an' ye'll hev t' take me out an' pray f'r me. Ye'll hev t' pray hard, too, f'r I've got it bad. Now git down an' at it."

Charley lay down in the shade of the house, and the deacon began to pray.

"A little louder, deacon, 'n ye better fan me, too. It'll have a better 'fect."

"There now, my good man," said the deacon, after he had prayed and fanned his would-be convert for about an hour, "I believe you've got religion."

"Not yit, deacon, not yit. I've jis' commenced t' see things. Keep 'er up. I've got a purty bad case, an' I'll backslide ef ye stop now."

The deacon again knelt beside him and fanned and prayed until exhausted. Charley pretended he had fallen asleep. The deacon got up and looked about, and when he saw we were all laughing, walked down to the pasture toward the river. Speck threw a bucket of water on the convert, which was taken good naturedly, but Charley got up and took after the preacher.

"I wish ye'd not babtize me so soon, Dutchy, fer I ain't got it yit. I'll hev t' go out in th' sun to dry off. Keep 'er up, deacon, keep 'er up. Yer a-doin' good t' th' heathen."

The deacon stopped and attempted to get away, but Charley hung to him.

"More, deacon, more. Don't quit me half finished," pleaded Charley, as he followed him about. He made the deacon go out into the corrals and pray with him there. Then they climbed up on the house.

"Now pray f'm th' housetop, deacon, yer a little nearder t' heaven 'an ye was on th' groun', an' kind o' change yer langwij. It'll hev more 'fect. There! I feel 'er a-comin'. Jis' keep 'er up." But the deacon had climbed down, taken his bridle and started after his horse.

"Don't ye g'way, deacon, yer a-makin' a fit subjec' fer cowboy heaven ef ye keep 'er up long 'nough."

The deacon had saddled his pony and was ready to go, but Charley insisted that he stay a while longer. The deacon mounted, but Charley sprang up behind him and held the reins.

"Don't leave me yit, deacon. I ain't quite over 't, an' I'm 'feared I'll backslide, runnin' 'ith these here ungodly people; an' b'sides, I ain't got th' worth o' m' money yit."

"Not going to leave us, deacon?" asked the general, as he walked out where he could enjoy the fun better.

"Yes. You see I had intended to hold a sort of revival services for a few days here, but I forgot I had an appointment down the river."

Charley finally let the deacon go, and walked back to the house and threw himself down on his bed to rest.

"Aren't you ashamed," said Mrs. Chump, "to make sport with one of God's servants."

"No, ma'am. Ye see, he owes me 'bout fifty dollars fer borried money, an' he allus says he'll

pay me in prayers, 'n as he had nothin' else ter do, I thought this 'ould be a good time t' pay th' int'rest."

"How much will you credit him for the evening's work?"

"I 'd thought 'bout a dollar, but he repeated hissef so much I guess thirty cents 'll be 'bout right."

"You don't want much for your money. I thought from the way you enjoyed it you would give him a receipt in full."

"Yer uv too gen'rous a disp'sition fer me. Ye see, this is somethin' like th' case 'ith th' boy yiste'day gittin th' fun an' t'other feller spendin' th' money."

"Tomato Charley shall have a new suit of clothes as soon as we reach the city," said Miss Clark. "I have laughed until I have a pain in my side, and, thank goodness, besides the fun we have had, we are rid of that old preacher."

Being disappointed in our hunting trip, the conversation drifted back to buffalo, wolves and mountain lion, and we resolved to go out the next day and have another hunt.

It was sundown when one of the Abbott boys, a manly young fellow about twenty years old, rode up, having come across from the South Beaver. His horse could scarcely walk, he was so tired, and it was some minutes before the boy could tell us why he had ridden so hard.

"The Injuns has killed m' ol' father, stole all th' hosses an' burnt our house an' stable. There's 'bout a hundred uv 'em, and they're a-comin' this way. They follered me till I made good Injuns uv four 'r five uv 'em. See, only one round o'

ca'tridges left. Poor ol' Bally, I'm 'fraid I've killed ye," he said, as he patted his horse on the neck.

Both were cared for with tender hands, and three guards were placed on the east, west and south of the ranch, the pasture fence protecting us on the north. At midnight or a little later these guards were relieved and others sent out. At daybreak all were called in to breakfast. The foreman then asked who would make a short tour of the hills about the ranch and endeavor to locate the Indians. Everyone except the major and Uncle Jimmy asked that they might go.

"You can't all go," said Dan. "Some of us must stay here to protect the ranch and women."

The general, Speck and I were finally selected to go, and the horses were brought in and saddled. The girls begged so hard that they were finally permitted to accompany us. We rode south a short distance, then ascended a high sand hill, from the top of which we could obtain a good view of the surrounding country.

"There they are, camped on the river bottom to the west of us," said the general, as he stood in his stirrups adjusting the field glasses. "I believe there's a hundred of them. Let's make the top of that high hill there, where we can get a better view. We'll be near the trail and can easily reach the ranch if they discover us."

We reached the top of the hill the general had pointed out, and there, near the mouth of a little creek that put in from the south, were the Indians, not over a half a mile away. They had rounded up their horses and were making preparations to move.

Blue Eye took the field glasses, looked at them a moment, then, turning to me, said, "They are Cheyennes."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"By their walk. A Cheyenne Indian walks flat-footed, much as we do, but a Sioux walks on his toes. He will sometimes walk for miles and scarcely touch his heels to the ground."

"Look here vonce alretty," said Speck, as he pointed to the southwest up the little creek. "Dere's der rest of der fam'lies coomin' ter meet 'em some more, aind it?"

We could see about as many Indians as we had seen on the river bottom. They were driving a large band of horses and beating their rawhide drums.

"Those are Sioux," said Blue Eye, "and I shudder to think what will happen. Indians moving in the same direction get along all right, but in a narrow canyon like that both will claim the right of way. Watch! Oh, it will be a glorious fight. See! The Cheyennes are well into the canyon with their horses, and there come the Sioux. They will meet at the bend of the creek, not half a mile away. Oh, if we were only a little closer!"

"Can you look at the fight," said I, as I rode up between the two girls. They assured me they could, and with no thought of our own safety we awaited results. The Indians met at the point we had expected they would. The horses they were driving came together, and each tribe seemed to claim the whole bunch as well as the right to the canyon. They held hurried pow-wows, then both charged, endeavoring to force

the horses through the other's ranks. The horses stampeded, circling close to where we stood, then turning north ran down the hill and across the river. The Indians came together and the fight was on. Some shot their horses and dropped behind them, while others crawled behind rocks and little clumps of trees. I have heard it said that Indians will not fight in the open. It may be they won't when they can get under cover. Blood ran deep in that little canyon that morning. What they were fighting about we never knew, nor did we care so long as they fought each other. The Sioux were armed the best, but the Cheyennes seemed stronger in numbers. Hand to hand they fought, more being killed with knives than with bullets. When it was over the scene was something dreadful to behold. The dead lay in heaps, but not a live Indian could be seen. If any survived they made their escape up the canyon.

We returned to the ranch and related the story of the massacre, "The Battle of the Arickaree."

The major had taken a little too much medicine that morning to be interested in Indian warfare, but Uncle Jimmy had witnessed a greater battle down on Big Sandy between the Arapahoes and Cherokees.

"I hope you didn't kill any of those harmless Indians, did you?" said Mrs. Chump.

"Harmless be damned," said young Abbott. "Those Sioux killed my father, and I would to God there had been a thousand on each side and all shared the same fate as these did. Harmless! If you were a man, you'd not make that state-

ment again, but being an ignorant woman—I mean ignorant regarding these red-handed murderous devils—I beg pardon for having spoken so harshly."

We were preparing for lunch, when Lieutenant Coward rode up with a few soldiers and a dozen enlisted men from the Bar. T. and T. T. ranches, and in a squeaky, shaky voice (for he was scared half to death) placed us all under arrest on the charge of killing Indians.

CHAPTER XIV.

The next morning those of us who had witnessed the massacre were marched back to the battle grounds.

Although we had learned to hate Indians as we hated wolves or other wild beasts of the plains, there were many expressions of sympathy as we stood and gazed on the awful scene before us.

"Two hundred dead Indians and half as many horses," said the Lieutenant, after his men had made a report. "You and your accessories will be taken to Ft. Junta for trial."

"For trial," said I, somewhat indignant. "Innocent until proven guilty is an old saying, and it will fit our case exactly. We have done nothing. We have explained to you that this was a battle between Indians, in which we had no part and for which we were not responsible. I speak not only for myself, but for my friends here, when I tell you we will not go with you to Ft. Junta for trial, or anywhere else."

"Sir, you shall be placed in irons. Corporal—"

"Not today, Lieutenant," said General Clark, as he raised his Winchester.

"Hold on, General! Hold on! We will go back to the ranch and talk this matter over."

"Very well, sir. That is just what we have wanted you to do—to listen to us; but you are so

hide bound and thick headed that nothing but a sword or a Winchester can penetrate you."

We returned to the ranch. After the horses were turned out the general and I interviewed the enlisted men and learned that Lieutenant Coward with one hundred men had followed the Sioux Indians from the Arkansas, keeping one day behind them; that the band had killed no less than a dozen immigrants and half as many ranchers during the past ten days.

"We enlisted," said one of the boys, "because we wanted to fight. We were with the soldiers and in plain sight of the Indians when old man Abbott was killed, and were ordered into camp on the opposite side of the creek and kept there until the Indians had crossed the divide north. Then we were divided into four squads. One was sent west up the Beaver, another east, our party coming over here, and the other sent back to Ft. Junta for instructions. We are all sick and tired of this horse play and are going to desert."

"Soldiers!" said another, "that Lieutenant is a disgrace to the flag he follows; we have a notion to strip him of his uniform and drag him to death at the end of a saddle rope."

"He is rightly named then," said the general.

"Yes, Coward. Why, he wouldn't step on a grub worm; we're going to desert him and go back to work."

"Don't desert; that would be disgraceful," said the general. "Make him give you a discharge. Was he in command when you enlisted?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then ask him for a discharge and we will see that you get it."

The lieutenant's head kept swelling until he became a very important being. The enlisted men were guarding us, but we wandered about the ranch at will. The soldiers were sent back to the Beaver, with instructions to overtake the squad that had gone east down that stream, and bring them over to assist in taking us to the fort. All went well with the lieutenant until the next morning. After breakfast his citizen soldiers informed him they had enlisted to fight Indians, and as there appeared to be nothing to do asked to be discharged.

"You will be discharged when I am through with you. Take your places on guard at once and see that no one escapes from this ranch."

"No more guard duty and no more soldiering under you. We want our discharge."

"Do you refuse to obey my orders?"

"We do. We want our discharge or we desert, and it won't be very healthy for you if you follow us and try to arrest us."

"I'll—here, prisoners, I call on you to assist an officer of the regular army. I'll arrest you all and place you in irons."

"Lieutenant," said the general, "you are a fool. We have done nothing wrong, and have treated you with the respect due one of your calling. You are a disgrace to your country. Discharge these boys and let them go their way. Yesterday when we were all down on the river you threatened the girls here because they would not sign a statement incriminating us, but I thank

God you found in them examples of true womanhood."

"But you are shielding some one here who took part in the Indian massacre a few days ago at the canyon.

"You are speaking now of something you know nothing about. You may come in the house and sign discharges for these boys and release them from further duty."

"I refuse to obey you, sir. You are my prisoner, and have no right to dictate what I shall do."

The general was the smaller man of the two, but it took only a few seconds to strip the lieutenant of his uniform and convince him that the boys had better be released. The discharges were signed, handed out, and with a wave of their hats those sturdy fellows rode away across the sand hills.

"Now, sir," said the general, "you will come with me, and we will walk down to the river where the girls are," and the two strolled off arm in arm as though they were the best of friends.

"Get down on your knees, Mr. Coward—I can't recognize your title—and make due apologies for having drawn your sword on them, and for the threats you made."

He obeyed, and the general took him by the arm and walked him back to the ranch.

"You may take your leave now if you wish and go back to the fort," continued the general. "I ought to have killed you, and would had I seen you standing before those girls with drawn sword; but since you won't fight we will let you go. Be gone now, and never set foot on the

Arickaree again, or I will kill you as I would a snake. Take this old coat and hat and leave yours and the flag here. Should you ever have command of troops again, and hear the cry of innocent men and women who are being butchered by Indians, go to their assistance like an American citizen and soldier. Your horse is ready and we will bid you good day, sir. As soon as I can get word to the fort I will see that you are courtmartialed for cowardice One moment more, Mr. Coward. You have been calling us your prisoners. You may sign a statement releasing us. There now, if you have any business in any other locality you had better get there."

"I say, general, he wus a purty big bluffer, wusn't 'e?" said Uncle Jimmy, as he walked back to the shade of the house. "But I seen a bigger coward 'an him, when we was fightin' Injuns over nigh th' Julesberg water holes on th' Platte."

The major and wife, Mr. and Mrs. Beverly, and Mr. and Mrs. Shore had to return to Chicago on important business.

The "touch of high life" the past week had been sufficient for them, so a team was hitched to the old hack and they started for Kit Carson with Uncle Jimmy as driver.

"Kind o' glad they wanted to go," said Dan, "for the driver 'll get our mail."

CHAPTER XV.

The days seemed longer as the time drew near for the return of the mail wagon. We had thought little about letters from home for several days, but now all were anxious. Uncle Jimmy returned in due time, and there was mail for all, except Blue Eye. The papers were many weeks old, but we read them, advertisements and all. That evening after dinner when all were seated in the front yard the faces of that little gathering told a story that words can not picture. There were as many kinds of news as there were persons to receive it. Births, graduations, marriages and deaths. All were silent, thoughtful. Those who had received good news were touched by the sorrowful faces of those about them. Walter sat near me, and when he turned his big honest face I could see his eyes were filled with tears.

"Walter," said I, "you have my sympathy, for I know you have received bad news." He arose and extended his hand in reply.

"Mother is dead."

This was all he could say for a time, but we saw he felt relieved, for his sorrow was too great to bear alone.

"Dear old mother has been dead almost a month and I didn't even know she was sick."

He held the letter a moment, his mind, no doubt, wandering back to the old home, then read aloud:

"Her last words were of you. Said she could have died happy if you had been here to tell her good-bye."

He folded the letter and fell back heavily upon his chair.

"God knows I would have gone to the end of the earth to see her," he continued, "but this is the first mail I have had for two months."

He arose and walked slowly away, preferring to be alone where he could think of "dear old mother."

The general extended his hand again as he left, and said:

"Walter, a sword hath pierced mine own heart also."

"Tom's comin' back," said Charley.

"Your brother Tom?" asked Dan. "Said he was going home to stay."

"Yas, but he's comin' back; says as how he's got 'nough uv ol' Mizzury. Here' I'll jis' read ye part uv 'is letter:

"'"'Taint like home, Charley, an' me heart is sad. Th' boys an' gals we played with when you an' me wus here togeth'r air dead er gone. How changed th' scene! Th' big woods pasture whar we hunted possums an' coons, an' cut bee trees an' got stung an' th' belly aik fer eatin' too much honey, 'taint there no more. Yer can't gether shellbark hick'rynuts an' pawpaws an' wild grapes an' persimmons in th' fall, ner dig artichokes an' sweet roots in th' spring time. Th' ol' homestead's cut inter little patches with a railroad, an' a town's only a mile off. Th' hills whar we coasted with our little gal sweethearts

hez been leveled by th' onsweep o' men. Th' little school house whar we went t' school one winter an' cut hick'ry teeters an' made love t' th' Mora gals, an' fit bigger boys 'an we wus, an' got licked s' of'en, an' hed sich good times, is gone too. An' ol' Perfesser Lake, he's dead. May God speak peace t' thet gran' ol' man's soul. He give us all th' book l'arnin' we ever got, an' I know Heaven is filled 'ith men jis' like 'im. With san'led feet an' silent tread (I heared this oncet at a big speakin') I went t' visit 'is ol' grave, an' knelt an' prayed fer thet ol' man, fer you an' me. Charley, don't ye come back, fer there's no one 'at 'ill r'member ye. Ye'll only feel bad. Right by th' hole at th' bend o' th' crick, whar we used t' go in swimmin' an' ketch mud cats an' silver sides, an' sometimes a big channel cat we could hardly pull out, right close by they've bored a well thet runs hot water. Yes, hot 'nough to bile 'n aig nearly. It all looks so unnatur'l. I ast a man thet hed been watchin' me, I guess, "Who heats thet water—no hot water when I wus here?" He kind o' looked at me an' smiled a little, but he didn't say nothin', and I jis' ast him ag'in, "Who heats thet water?"

" ' "Goddlemighty."

" 'An' then he smiled at me ag'in an' walked away. An' thet's th' kind o' ans'ers ye git. Bin gone nigh onter twenty yar, an' people think I orter know what's bin goin' on, I reckon. But th' saddest uv all, Charley, an' I ken hardly tell ye 'bout it; th' little moun' yer r'member jis' back o' th' orchard whar we buried our ol' father an' mother, an' wus orphans then an' no next o' kin but you an' me; they moved them

too, an' buried 'em in th' new cem't'ry, an' I went to see the'r restin' place. I took a lot o' purty flowers, an' a man 'at keeps th' place led me to the'r grave, fer I tole him who I wus. I knelt down on th' grassy plot, but 'twas like prayin' fer strangers. I planted a rose bush an' a weepin' willer, an' as I turned t' go, I ast th' man t' see thet th' earliest buds o' spring 'ud unfold the'r beauties over the'r last restin' place, an' to make th' sweetness uv th' summer's last rose linger longest. Then I got some more flowers an' went back t' th' ol' grave back o' th' orchard, an' which is a pertater patch now an' all leveled down, an' I dec'rated th' place what wus the'r graves. An' when I shet my eyes I could see the'r dear ol' faces a-sleepin' there yit. An' now, good-bye. I'm comin' back t' th' country whar th' coyotes howl one t' sleep, an' whar a man 's measured by 'is heart 'stead uv 'is clo'es. Our ol' sweethearts is both married an' got smart husban's, I reckon, but they've lived here all the'r lives, an' I don't think they savvy much 'bout th' country. They both went t' St. Louis oncet, which you know is fifty-three mile, an' they tol' me if th' country wus as big west as it wus east she mus' be a whopper. Good-bye. Tell th' boys I'm comin' back, sad 't heart an' glad t' git away f'om here.' "

" Well," said Dan, as Charley stopped reading and brushed away a tear, "Tom's place is waiting for him, for I thought he would be back. And Kid, here is something for you. I got a letter, too, and it pleased me very much, I tell you. Here, take this."

I took the little piece of paper he handed me, walked over to the light, and found it to be a draft for three thousand dollars endorsed to me.

"What is this for?" I asked, without letting those present know what he had given me.

"Well," said he, "there was a reward of one thousand dollars offered for each of those rustlers that were killed in Cottonwood gulch. I reported that three of them had gone to their long sleep, and the Cattle Growers' Association of Denver has paid the reward, sent me the draft, and I'm happy to turn it over to you."

"But I'm not entitled to any reward. I haven't killed or captured any rustlers."

"No, but you were the means of ridding the country of three of the worst characters that ever operated in any community. The money is yours and I want you to keep it."

"Since it comes from the association I will accept it, on condition that you return it and have it made in two drafts of fifteen hundred dollars each, for Speck shall have half of it."

This he agreed to, and in due time we received the money.

"You earned it and more too; and now, to clear your conscience, if that troubles you any, I'll show you my commission. I'm a deputy United States marshal, and sewed into your's and Speck's pillows are your commissions. I appointed you deputies, signed your papers and tucked them away before you started for the Meadows. As citizens you were justified in killing those men, and as officers you only did what was commanded of you to do—to break up that

band of thieves. You did your work well, and the association pays you this for your trouble."

All this was news to some of the boys, and when Dan had explained matters more fully to them, they shook hands with Speck and I and congratulated us.

"Ther' ain't a drop o' fear blood in er man thet 'ud crawl in a den like thet. Ruther go up agin wild cats an' lions 'an them Cottonwood cow thieves, an' 'twas a mir'cle ye wasn't killed 'fore Speck got there," was the way Tomato Charley expressed his sympathy.

Mrs. Clark had pushed her chair up a little closer that she might hear better, and the girls came and stood by me, resting their hands on my shoulders.

"Is that where our boy got this?" asked Blue Eye, as she parted my hair, and took a look at the big scar along the side of my head. "Why didn't you tell us about that before?"

"I told the foreman and did not suppose it was necessary to say anything to anybody else."

"Ah, now I know something. A day or two before you and Tex came after me, Arkansaw Bill and Fitz came to the village and I heard them talking about some one killing their partners. They swore they would have revenge, and suspected two of the boys at the Meadows."

"You knew those two fellows, then?" said Dan.

"Yes. They used to come to the Indian village often. They were disreputable characters, and I tell you my revolver was always in easy reach when they were about. You boys must

keep close watch, for they intend to kill you at sight."

There were many expressions of surprise, as nearly all the riders present had known Bill and Fitz for many years, and thought they were good honest fellows.

"More good men gone wrong," said Charley. "Couldn't r'sist th' tem'tation t' git rich quick, an' us eatin' an' a sleepin' with 'em ever' day. Never would a b'lieved it, 'cept with pos'tive proof. But yer can't nearly always tell how black er man's heart is by th' broad smile uv his face. Yer got t' look deeper 'n thet."

CHAPTER XVI.

There was nothing worthy of mention occurred at the ranch for several days. A few little bands of Indians were seen as they passed through the country on their way back to the reservation, and the roundup wagon and outfit went out to brand calves and gather beeves. The general had bought the Rock Creek ranch, including about three thousand cattle and two hundred horses, and gone over to take charge. Mrs. Clark returned to Chicago for a month's visit and to tell their friends they had purchased a place in the west and would make their future home there. I was sorry I had not been sent out with the roundup but did not complain. The girls assisted me in keeping up the fences, and I helped them fish and hunt. August was nearly gone and the weather was very hot. Dan called me into his room one evening, just after the girls and I had planned a trip to Rock creek, saying he wanted to see me.

"I want some one," he began, "to go over to Kit Carson. The boss will be there about the first, and I can't go to meet him. Would you like to go?"

"Certainly," I replied, "but I'm so busy I don't well see how I can spare the time. Really, I have been so busy the last few weeks I haven't had time to draw my salary."

"That's just it. The manager will be there with a little cash, and I want you to go and get it

so I can pay off. I think the girls and I can get along all right, especially with Tobe and Uncle Jimmy to help, but no more of that. We will lose no sleep over the days you have been loafing, for had I wanted you to do more I would have told you. You had better fix to start day after tomorrow, for I want you to be there in good time. I will write a letter so he will know who you are, and if he don't come by the first of next month you can wire him."

I had told Miss Clark and Blue Eye that our trip to Rock creek would have to be postponed on account of the trip I must make to the railroad, but said we would go over after I got back. In due time my horses were made ready—Muggins, Brownie, Bloch and Old Tige—and I bade them all good-bye and started for Kit Carson.

"We are going, too," said Blue Eye, as she and Miss Clark came leading their horses out of the corral. "Oh, no, not all the way; just out on the divide. We'll be back by four o'clock, Tobe," and we waved our hands as we rode away.

"Do you believe in dreams?" said Miss Clark, as we turned away from the trail and started across the divide toward the Republican river.

"It depends some on what kind of a dream it is."

"Well, any kind. Tell us, do you believe in them?"

"Now I hope you girls haven't been seeing things with your eyes shut; it's bad enough to see them when awake."

"Yes, but this is worse," said Blue Eye. "We both dreamed nearly the same thing, and we are afraid."

She stopped a moment, turned her face away, wiped her eyes with her handkerchief, and continued: "We just dread to have you go. You will be robbed or killed. I dreamed of two men, and Miss Clark saw three, after you."

"Well, we must take those dreams as good omens, for dreams of that kind never come true."

"Yes they do, and we just know something dreadful will happen to you."

I tried to get them to talk of other matters, but to no effect. I would "surely be killed, and must not go." It was almost noon when we halted at the top of a high sand hill. "There," said I, "between those two high bluffs is the T. T. ranch. I will camp just below there to-night."

"Do you know the way to where you are going so you won't get lost?"

"Yes, very well. I came over the trail from Los Animas last spring, up the Big Sandy to Kit Carson, then across to the Republican. There is a good trail from the river there. Back here is the Home ranch. Be sure you head off right, and I will say good-bye."

"We haven't gone yet," said Blue Eye, as she sat leaning forward with one elbow on the saddle horn, and resting her head in her hand.

"But you must. You see it is after twelve, and you promised to be back by four."

Neither answered me, nor made any move to go.

"Come, girls, you really must be going," I continued. "I want to see that you get started back right, for with no trail you might lose your way."

"Here," said Blue Eye, "take this," and she handed me a little flask of brandy, which I took and slipped into my canteenas. I then shook hands with them, brushed away the tears that stood on their cheeks and waved them good-bye as they started home.

I reached the Republican and stopped for the night. I ate a portion of the lunch I had brought and lay down to ponder over those dreams. "Two men in one, and three in the other," I said, talking to myself, and with sixshooter clasped in my hand I fell asleep. I awoke the next morning somewhat worried, as I had seen many strange faces, and two or three that looked altogether too familiar. "Just a nightmare," said I, talking to Muggins, who had come up for me to take the bell off and get a sandwich. My bed was soon rolled and carefully tied onto old Tige; Brownie was saddled and I started south on that long ride. Sixty-five miles without water over a hot dusty trail was not a trip to be enjoyed, but by the middle of the afternoon I was seated in the shade of old Tony's saloon waiting for the train. I had gone to the section house and spoken for a bed and meals, that being the only hotel.

"Ye can git a good shquare male," said the lady I found there, "but th' ixtry bid we hov is rasarved fer drummers. If no one comes yez can hov it. If they do, yez can't."

The train from Denver rolled in about five o'clock, slowed up, a mail sack was kicked off,

another thrown on, and a big, fat, good-natured drummer stepped off, and the train was gone.

Dinner over, we all walked over to old Tony's, there being no other place to loaf. Old Tony, like the other twenty-nine residents of the place, was not there for his health, for he worked his men on the section during the day, then made them furnish music at his saloon at night.

"Come, ye domned Eyetallions, shtart up th' music there," we heard him blurt out as the drummer and I stepped in to get a cigar.

"There's goin' t' be a big game t'noight, so chune er up fer th' b'ys."

Well, the music and the game started, poker at one table and three card monte at the other. The drummer took a hand, donated fifty for the good of the cause, had a row with the dealer, hit a Mexican over the head with his sixshooter and retired. I took no part in the game nor the little family quarrel they had about midnight, neither did I attend the funeral of the "Eyetallion" who was too slow with his gun. Finally, tiring of the drunken gang, I carried my bed across the railroad back of the section house and lay down for a little rest. I knew I could not sleep. All seemed anxious to know who I was, where I came from and what I was going to do, but I kept my own counsel. The night wore away, that is, the portion that was left of it, and I was first to reach the section house for breakfast.

"Air yez Dan Powell?" said Mrs. Tony, addressing me as I left the breakfast table.

"That name will do as well as any," I replied.

"Ye're a domned liar. It's well I know Misther Powell, an' yer not him."

"Why did you ask then?"

"Because I hov a missage fer 'im, an' t'ought mebbe ye'd come afther it."

"I came here as his representative, and if you will give me the message I will deliver it to him."

"Indade, ye're a foine-lookin' b'y, an' since th' missage is of no importhance, excipt some wan is comin', I guess yez can hov it."

I opened the telegram and read:

"If you have reached Kit Carson, answer.
"J. C. McC."

I wired back, signing the foreman's name with my own initials attached, and received the following:

"Be there tomorrow with money for the men. Must return first train. J. C. McC."

By noon that day everybody in town knew what I was there for and all about my business.

When the hangerson around old Tony's wanted to know about mail, express or telegrams, the man who handled these things told them as though they were matters the public should know. I spent the day reading a novel I had picked up; that is, I read with one eye and took notice with the other of what was going on about me.

Old Tony's saloon faced north, was situated about two hundred feet from the railroad on the opposite side, and about four hundred feet from the section house. I had taken a chair that afternoon and carried it around on the east side where I could be in the shade, and seated myself under the window so I could hear.

"By's," said old Tony, "yez must git 'im in a game; he'll hov a long sack."

"Wall, I reckon we're onto that," said one of the dealers, "we're fixin' the cyards now. If he wins we'll break 'er up in a row, an' take th' stuff."

"'T won't be hard t' do, nuther," put in another. "He ought ter be back in th' settlements with a close herd. Too tender fer this country. 'F 'e won't play, we'll touch 'im a'ter 'e goes t' bed. An' 'f we can't do thet, we'll jis' foller th' lad when 'e makes back fer th' river."

After I had listened to them as long as I wished, I got up, went into the saloon, threw a dollar upon the bar and asked them all to have a drink. I wanted to mingle with them, so I would know who had done the talking.

"Ever play poker, Kid?" asked a Mexican they called Slim.

"No, never played a game in my life."

"Want 'o learn?"

"No, I have no desire to learn. Care nothing about cards at all."

"Come on, lemme show ye."

"No, thanks."

"Then lemme show ye how t' play three cyard monte."

"Not today. I'll tell you what I will do, though; I'll play any one of you a game or two of billiards."

"Will y'u make it five a side?"

"Yes, five or ten; I've got to kill time some way, so pick your man and we'll start in."

"Git yer cue, Ike, and go to 'im. If ye win, I'll give ye ha'f. Go ye ten, Kid."

But Ike couldn't win. He lost three straight games and I was thirty dollars to the good.

"It's only a tem'prary loan we're makin'; jis' double it an' git 'er back."

"This is my game, boys, and I will beat you if you go against me. Let's stop now."

"Come out uv it, Kid; we're not tenderfeet. When we've hed 'nough we'll throw up th' sponge. Make it twenty. Ye only beat us four p'ints."

I did not want to get too well acquainted, so ran the game out as quickly as possible, winning by just half. I put up my cue, asked them all to have another drink and walked out.

"Lookin' fer suckers, air ye?" said one.

"Well, we didn't take 'im on," said another.

"Better cut 'im out, Slim," said old Tony.

The gong sounded, I went to supper, and as soon as it was dark slipped away, carrying my bed across the river, and got a good night's sleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

The drummer remained in town, but I made up my mind to sleep in that bed the next night, for as the day passed I could see I was being watched. The entire population was determined I should learn to play cards, but billiards was the only game I knew, and they had discovered they could not play that.

When the train came in, only one passenger got off. I walked up to him, introduced myself and received a pleasant greeting. He was anxious to know all about affairs at the ranch; what harm the Indians had done, and what had become of Arkansaw Bill and Fitz. We had reached the section house, and as we entered I whispered a few words to him, and he understood he was to say nothing about anything until we were alone. After supper he went to his grip, took out a lot of papers, slipped me a coin bag which I tucked away inside my shirt bosom, and we walked down to the river to look after the horses.

I then told him all that had happened, how the gang around town had learned all about my business, and asked him to take the money back to Denver.

"Nonsense," he replied. "You can lick that whole crowd, and as to getting home I'll tell you now you won't have to walk. That string of horses will carry you to the Republican and never sweat a hair. Do you ever gamble?"

"No, sir, I never play cards, but I might get held up."

"I'm not afraid of that. Come, we must walk back, as my train is due at nine thirty, and I must go back to Denver. I had to press a point to get away at all, but I was anxious for news from the ranch. I thought maybe Dan would send you over, and I'm glad he did, for I wanted to see the fellow who made the locations in Cottonwood gulch."

We reached the section house just in time to get his grip and catch the train. He waved his hand as the train pulled out, saying:

"Give my regards to the boys, and tell them I will be at the ranch in a few days with another month's salary."

Twenty-seven hundred dollars in gold inside my shirt resting on my revolver belt did not feel very comfortable, so I went back to the section house and took possession of the drummer's room. The building was a two-story frame structure, with a stairway going up from the dining room. The drummer's room was about ten by twelve, and was cut off of one end. The door was made of canvas. The remainder of the second story was left in one big room and contained four beds. After acquainting myself with the surroundings I went down, walked over to the store, bought a set of horse shoes and a wide strip of lace leather, telling the clerk I wanted to mend my saddle. As I walked back I picked up a fine Mexican hat with silk cord and a rattlesnake band. There had been a horse race on the street and one of the riders had lost his hat, so I took it, pulled off the band, tucked it inside my shirt with the money bag and

threw the hat across the railroad. My saddle lay beside the house, so I dragged it into the light, put in some new lace strings and made a new strap for the bell. This I stitched good and strong and tied the horse shoes to it ready to tie onto Muggins' neck the next morning.

The drummer had come in, gone to his room and was sound asleep.

"Mrs. Tony," said I, "there's no use talking, I've got to have a bed tonight. The coyotes have kept we awake three nights now, and I've got to have some sleep."

"There's nary a bed fer yez, an' yez'll have to shlape out."

"I think I'll take the drummer's bed," I replied.

"Ye'll not, ye dirty blaggard."

"I'll bet you I do."

"Here's tin dollars thot says ye don't."

"Well, here is ten dollars that says I will. Do you want to see a little fun?"

"He'll shoot th' head off o' yez if ye go near 'im. Now moind phwat I'm tellin' yez."

I went upstairs, pulled off my boots, pushed the canvas door aside, and crawled under the bed. I then took the stuffed snake and reached up and drew it across the drummer's face. He gave a yell, sprang out of bed and struck a match. When it got to burning I drew the snake off the bed and he went down stairs just like a bear goes down a mountain. What he and old Mrs. Tony said when they met at the foot of the stairs would not look well in print. I had taken the snake skin, split a toothpick and stuck into its mouth, and threw it across the pillow, holding onto the

tail so I could shake the rattles. They came to the door, holding the candle above their heads, and peeped in.

"Be th' howly St. Pathrick!" said Mrs. Tony. "It's shore a rattler. See it dart out its farked tongue!"

I must omit again the drummer's language. They went back down stairs, got some sort of grab hook, dragged out the drummer's grip and clothes, and left the bed and room to the snake. Now a snake in a bed at night has no extraordinary charms, and although the gang thought I was in that room, no one molested me. With the snake coiled on my breast I got a very good night's sleep.

"Gwan, now, ye blaggard," said Mrs. Tony, as I came down to breakfast. "Ye hov shnakes in yer busom, and may th' divil fly away wid ye. Th' drummer left me house in a rage, an 'll niver come back. I wint over an' got th' Mixicans from th' saloon t' come an' bate th' head off o' yez, an' 'bout wan in th' mornin' we pulled th' curthan aside, an' there yez lay paceful like, wid as foine a spicimen of th' prairie rattler 'bout th' size of a broom stick as ye'd foind in a day's ride. Whin we saw th' shnake curled so innicent loike on yez brist, darthing its farked tongue at us, we wint down shtairs, touchin' only th' top an' bottom shtips. We moight 'ave hit wan more shtip, but I don't ramimber thot. Ye owe me five fer board fer yersilf an' th' boss, and here is five on th' wager. It's a dirty shnake charmer an' dago juggler ye air, an' do ye moind now, ye're niver t' darken me dure agin."

I bade her good morning, picked up my bell, and went down to the river a few rods away and got my horses. I packed my bed on old Tige, saddled Bloch, and lashed the bell on Muggins, for I knew he would never leave me no matter what happened. I then went over to the saloon to get a few cigars and bid the boys good-bye. None of them would come near me, so with the snake's head sticking out of my shirt bosom I showed them a few tricks with the cards. I told them I could spare an hour if any of them wanted a game, but the bluff worked nicely. No one would play me. Seeing that I would not have to back up, I told them I played with snakes as I would with a bit of rope, could read the cards as well from the back as from the face, bowed myself out of the saloon, rode over to the section house, got the lunch the "Eyetallion" cook had put up for me, and started north over that long, dusty trail. I had no further fear from those Mexicans, but one of them told me later they had intended to follow and rob me of the money I was carrying.

It was ten o'clock when I reached Sand creek, about fifteen miles out from the station, and although there was no water I stopped to change horses. I saddled Brownie, and as I mounted he commenced to buck. What made him do it I could never tell, unless he wanted to show me that he had not forgotten how, and I am frank to admit he was a past master in the art. How I managed to stick to him is a mystery, but I knew if he threw me he would run away with my saddle and that I would probably never catch him. When he stopped bucking I had to get off and lie

down for a few minutes, for I was sick and felt as if the life was jarred out of me. After my nose stopped bleeding I felt some better, mounted and started on. I did not whip him, for he was an excellent roadster and could carry me as far in a day as any horse I had ever ridden. Like Muggins, he would never give up.

It was about three o'clock when I came in sight of the low bluffs on the opposite side of the Republican river. "The worst is over, Brownie," I said, talking to my horse, for I was giving him a good hard ride for the shaking up he had given me.

"Believe in dreams?" I would ask myself, then jog along for awhile half asleep. Then I would rouse myself again and talk to the horse. "Two men in one dream, Brownie, and three in the other. Only a few miles more, and I'll just ride you on in, you old fool. Won't you ever learn to be good?" He neighed loudly, quickened his pace, and as I looked up I saw two riders coming up the trail. I took out my field glasses and looked closely, but there was so much dust I could not tell who they were. When I got within about half a mile of them, they turned and rode back toward the river. I pushed up a little, and when within about two miles of the river I recognized them. I stopped, caught Muggins, and twisted the clapper out of the bell. It was Arkansaw Bill and Fitz. I knew I must get down to the river, get water for myself and horses, and elude them in some way. They had sworn they would kill me at sight, so I did not care for their company. When they reached the river they turned to the left, making it impossible

for me to reach the T. T. ranch without riding by them, so I turned down the stream a few rods, and unsaddled, as though I were going into camp. We were now about a half mile apart. I ate my lunch, but kept watching them with the glasses. They were sitting on the ground, and from the motions they made I judged they were discussing the different trails over the divide to the Arickaree, and trying to figure out which one I would be most likely to take. I had finished my lunch and was wondering what to do. Muggins came up and rubbed his head against me, and I knew he wanted the old bell and horse shoes off his neck. Presently I saw another rider come down the river, stop and talk with Bill and Fitz, then strike out north over the trail towards the head of Cottonwood gulch. Bill soon followed, but turned back onto the river below me, so there I was with these fellows guarding the trail. It was growing quite dark, but I saw the fellow who had started north come back to within about half a mile of me, dismount and lie down. As it grew darker I could see they were all closing in on me. My first thought was to bury the money in the river, and turn back toward Kit Carson. This I decided would not do, for their horses were fresh and they would soon overtake me. But get out I must. I knew Brownie would go home if given a little scare, so I hurriedly wrote a note, tied it in his mane, picked up a tomato can and tied it to his tail. I packed old Tige, saddled Bloch, and put a rope on Muggins to lead him with. I could now see nothing but the dim figures of their horses. A bullet whistled over my head from the north. I picked up some pebbles, put them into

the can, headed Brownie down the river and gave him a slap; the can hit his heels and away he went, with old Tige galloping after him. They headed northeast, straight across the divide for home, with all three of the men who had been guarding me after them. I started north, for I knew they would soon overtake the pack horse, and would discover, too, that Brownie had no rider. They emptied their sixshooters at the horses, then ceased firing; the rattle of the can died away and all was quiet save the squeak of my saddle. I struck the trail leading north, urging my horses on as fast as I could. I had ridden about four miles when I stopped to listen, and could hear horses coming across the hills toward me. On I went again at full speed, for I had now reached the top of the divide. They opened fire on me. The bullets kept coming closer and closer, and I felt my hair pushing my hat off. I turned in my saddle, for I felt they must soon overtake me, and returned their fire. After several minutes of this running fight one of their number gave up the chase, so I knew I had either killed him or his horse, but did not know which. My horse fell, throwing me to the ground, and presently I felt some one going through my pockets and heard him searching my saddle, but could offer no resistance.

"Haint got a damn cent 'bout 'im; but we've plugged 'im good an' plenty. Guess 'e's with th' angels b' this time," said one of them as they rode away.

My right thigh was smarting when I recovered, and my left shoulder felt as if it had been torn away. I managed somehow to mount again,

but urge my horses as I would, a little dog trot was as fast as I could make them go. I soon became weak and sick, and after a spell of vomiting, felt as if I were bleeding to death. Bloch stopped, I dismounted and unsaddled him, and he reeled and fell a rested horse. Muggins was all I had left. I saddled him, gave him a sandwich, climbed upon his back and started on toward the Arickaree. How far it was I did not know, but I knew I must find water or die of thirst and pain. I felt Muggins weakening under me, and got down and walked awhile. Then I thought of the brandy, took a big drink of that and felt better. I stopped, emptied the blood out of my right boot, and found I had barely strength enough to draw it back on again. I climbed back onto the pony, for I was too weak to walk; the strength the brandy had given me left again as suddenly as it came. I took another drink and commenced talking to my horse.

"Take me to the river, Muggins, and if I fall off wait for me. Do horses believe in dreams, Muggins? Two men in one, and three in the other! Oh, if those two girls were only here to help me home! Will Brownie get home? Will they find the note I tied in his mane? Will old Tige go straggling in with my bed, or has the old horse been killed and the bed destroyed?"

These and many other questions I remember asking, but got no answer. Muggins was jogging on down the trail, but where we were going and when we would get there I did not know. I took another drink of brandy and felt a little better.

"Ho!" I said to Muggins, but the horse had already stopped, and putting my hand out felt a wire fence. I climbed down, opened the gate, mounted again and rode on down the canyon. I commenced to feel faint again, when Muggins plunged into a spring and I rolled off, lay down on the ground and drank with him. I then bathed my thigh and shoulder, which were paining me terribly. I got up to look about and could see a faint light breaking in the east. To my right I could see a clump of trees. Cottonwood gulch! And the cold chills commenced to chase each other up and down my back. There was the tree where I was to be hanged, and up there on the hill lay the three desperadoes Speck had killed. I looked at the trees again and they seemed to be covered with crepe or black moss.

"Come Muggins," I whispered to him, "I shall die from fear. Let us get out of here," and I mounted and started on down the canyon.

I found the place where I had cut the wire, when I came out of the pasture a few weeks before, and was soon on the trail headed for home. But I was growing weaker and felt sick, so I dismounted, lay down by the trail and went to sleep.

Something gave me a jerk that woke me up. I raised my head, and Muggins was pulling at my shirt and rubbing his head against me. I got up, but could not mount the horse, though by hanging onto the saddle could walk a little. When I fell, he would wait for me.

"Go on home, Muggins," I remember saying to the horse, "and tell them what you have in the bell strap. I will lie here and go to sleep."

CHAPTER XVIII.

What happened the next few days must be told by some one else. I had been found, taken to the ranch, and when I awoke from what seemed to me a long sleep, the girls were standing near asking if I did not recognize them. When I told them I did, they bent over and kissed my aching forehead. The boys all came in, but were not allowed to speak to me.

"Lie still," said Blue Eye, as she bathed my face. "The doctor says you must not talk; that with perfect quiet he will pull you through."

"But where have I been? Did you find the money?"

"No, the money is gone, but you must not worry about that."

"It's not gone. Bring me the bell. Didn't you find the note I tied in Brownie's mane? Bring me the bell strap."

"Poor boy! Poor boy!" I heard the general say, for he had left his ranch and come over to help nurse me. "His mind is wandering again. Would to God we might do something to ease his sufferings."

I reached out my hand to him, which he took and held for a moment, then turned, wiped his eyes and walked away. I wanted to thank him, but he had left the room.

"You must be quiet now," said Blue Eye, and she came back to bathe my face and shoulder again.

"But I want you to bring me the bell strap," I replied.

"Tomorrow, if you are stronger," and I was soon asleep and did not wake until the next morning.

The doctor came and was much pleased with my condition, for I had eaten a few bites and felt stronger.

"Can I talk a little, doctor?" I asked.

"Very little. You are quite weak yet, and nothing must be said that will excite you."

"Blue Eye, can I have the bell strap now? The doctor says I can talk a little."

She went out to the corral, and came lugging in the bell, strap and horseshoes. She and the doctor were the only ones in the room.

"Now be a good girl, get a knife, cut off the horseshoes and throw them out. We have no further use for them."

When this was done, I asked her to cut the lace string that held the bell. She brought me the bell, but I told her to throw that out also.

"I thought you wanted the bell," said she, looking somewhat disappointed.

"No; the strap is what I wanted. Ever lift as heavy a strap as that?" She brought it to the bed, cut the lace strings and poured the money out beside me.

"Here's the money! I knew we would find it," I heard her say, as she ran out to call the boys. They all came in, Dan counted the money and found more than the payroll called for, so left the difference, together with what was due me in wages, lying beside me.

"Well, how did you do it, anyway?" he asked. "I'm glad to get the money for the boys, but that was of small moment compared with the anxiety we have felt for you. We had arranged, though, to pay it back to the company; there would have been no loss to you. The five of us here have signed one hundred dollars each, Speck put in his reward draft of fifteen hundred dollars, and the general has just given me his check for the balance. When Brownie came home, we knew something was wrong, and all started out to hunt you. We found old Tige shot so badly that we had to kill him, and your bed was scattered all along the river, Tobe went up to the T. T. ranch, and helped bury Fitz while there. They said he committed suicide. Do you know anything about it?"

I told them my experience with the people at Kit Carson, the fight with Fitz, Arkansaw Bill and the unknown man who followed me up the trail toward Cottonwood gulch.

"That makes matters plain. That unknown man was Sandy Delano, a disreputable fellow who hangs about Kit Carson a great deal. He came over the trail the day before you did and stopped at the ranch, and Bill and Fitz joined in the scheme with him to rob you; we are more than glad, to know you outwitted them. Fitz will trouble us no more, and I only wish you had got Bill and Sandy, too. Where is old Bloch?"

"I rode him to death. He dropped dead in the trail near the head of Cottonwood gulch. I am sorry, but there was no time to change horses on that ride."

"Well, we will not worry about the horse; we were simply wondering what became of him."

"Er tame chicken lays aigs at home."

"What's the matter now?" said the general, as he turned to greet Tomato Charley, who had come in from the roundup.

"Wall, I wuz thinkin' uv Fitz. We wus comin' down f'om West Beaver an' met Bill an' Sandy, an' they tol' us as how Fitz hed committed sideways, but we foun' out better 'fore we got here. How air, ye Kid? No crape on th' door, an' I guess ye'll pull through, won't ye?"

"I hope so," I replied.

"Wall, yer will. I ken see it in yer face; an' besides, er man whats got th' stuff in 'im as you've got 'll not die till 'is time comes. Bill hed one arm in a sling, an' Sandy's head wus done in wet cloths an' brown paper. Give 'em a run fer the'r money, didn't ye?"

"No, they gave me a run for mine."

"But say, Dan," continued Charley, "I fergot t' tell ye. I got a letter f'om ol' Pete McQuat; ye r'member him, don't ye?"

"Yes. Where is he? No one has heard from him since he left the range nearly two years ago."

"He's in Honerlula, an' he wants me t' come down thar. I'll jis' read ye th' letter. No, I can't either, fer he gits in too many hiferlutin' words. Gen'al, you read it. Ye see ol' Pete wuz mighty well edicated, an' I'd spile th' beauty uv 'is lang'age."

The general took the letter and read as follows:

"And now, Charley, something about the country and its people. It's a land of pretty women. Even the children of other nations take on something of the beauty of the climate, and American girls born here are phantoms of delight. The Kanaka women possess a clear, dark skin, black sensuous eyes that alternately sparkle and melt; small hands and feet, and figures that are perfect. Light-heartedness and tenderness are characteristic. They age early like females of all tropical climes, but when young are irresistible. It was a good thing for St. Anthony that his visitants were not of the Kanaka race. On these seafaring islands many a man has sunk into lethargy, 'his people forgetting by him forgot.' The years pass like the promises of friends to return the ten they owe you. Yesterday is as today, and today as tomorrow.

"A story is told of an old man here, whom his countrymen found and offered a passage home. He laughed and slyly shook his head, and why not? 'Here,' said he, 'is rest and pleasant dreams. Around you rolls the blue expanse that looks so fair and is so cruel. Its fish will feed you, and the wine of the banana will make you glad. The girls will love you, so stay with me. Si, Senor, stay with me.'

"Man and woman do pretty much as they please so long as they do not injure their neighbors. There is not more immorality than elsewhere, but a freer system of living. It is a summer always, and the siesta is a fixed institution. Hammocks, inviting to repose, are to be seen everywhere. Flowers are in profusion and their scent is in the air. Languor compels quiet, but

there is no necessity for exertion. Soft blow the breezes, and the dull boom of the ocean lulls to slumber. There are great opportunities here for Americans, provided they retain their energy, but I doubt very much if they can do that. They will be happy in these modern hesperides, but they will probably lose their reverence for the almighty dollar. Under the shadow of the great Mauna Loa, whose burning heart smoulders through the centuries, life is pleasant, the Lotus is eaten, and men and women dream."

"I'll go down thar, mebbe," said Charley, when the general had finished reading and handed him back the letter.

"Th' girls will love ye, an' men an' women dream. Wall, thet's nothin' agin a country, I reckon."

CHAPTER XIX.

It was the last of September, before I was able to be out, and what a pleasure it was to be riding about assisting with the work, instead of lying in bed or being propped up in an easy chair. Blue Eye and Miss Clark had nursed me with the same care my sisters would have done, and to them I owe my life today. For without them I think I should have given up the fight. They would ride far across the sand hills and up the canyon to gather wild flowers for me, and then sit by me and read from what few books there were around the ranch. But with all their kindness, I felt as one released from bondage when I could go out with them.

The general would come over to see me occasionally, and tell me of a hunting trip he had arranged far out beyond the head of Rock creek, and this increased my longing to be out doors again. I had often begged the girls to tell me how they happened to find me, and what all had been done and said while I lay there at the ranch, but the best I could get was a promise to do so some time.

We had ridden up the river about six miles one morning, when Blue Eye, turning to me, said:

"There is where you lay when we found you, but we must ride on. This is too sad a place for me."

"And I cannot bear to linger here, either," said Miss Clark.

"Let's go up that gulch and sit in the shade of those little hackberries, and you tell us all about what happened after the day we left you, the day you started to Kit Carson, then we will tell you our end of the story."

"Do you believe in dreams, now?" asked Blue Eye, after I had given them all the details of the trip. "Surely you do."

"Never mind about that; tell me what has been going on. There was so much I could not remember, and I am anxious to know."

"There's one thing you haven't told us yet. What induced you to hide that money in the bell strap?"

"Well, I feared I would be robbed, so I hid the money in there, and then tied those horse-shoes on to make weight. The money I carried was nearly all gold, but if anyone had felt of the strap, they would naturally think the shoes gave it the weight and not search any further. Now, I hope that clears up the mystery of the bell strap."

"Yes, it does," said Blue Eye, "and how unthoughtful we were not to look there for the money. You kept telling us to cut open the bell strap, but we never thought once to do it. We just felt sure you would never get back alive, but dared not tell the boys about our dreams. They would have called it a 'fool notion of ours,' and teased us for our interest in you. Well, Brownie came home that morning and he looked a sorry sight. Speck came running in to tell us, but he was so excited he could scarcely speak.

We all rushed out, and I found the note tied in his mane. I was too eager to see what news it contained, for I tore it in two and must have lost part of it. All I could make out was that you were at the river, surrounded by those men; that you would start old Tige and Brownie down the river and try to make your escape north toward Cottonwood gulch. The horses were all out in the pasture, and although it was only a few minutes until they were up and saddled, those minutes seemed an age. Tobe and the foreman went across the sand hills, and Miss Clark, Speck and I went up the river. It was about nine o'clock when we sighted Muggins, and when we rode up he was rubbing his head against you, evidently trying to wake you up. We carried you down to the river somehow, gave you a drink and bathed your face and shoulder. You talked of bells, snakes, billiards, three card monte, and poker, but said you never played. I think you cursed Bill and Fitz a little, but I don't remember. We finally got you onto Speck's horse, but it took all three of us walking beside you to keep you there. When we got you to the ranch, Speck went to Binkleman for the doctor. All we could do was to bathe your wounds in cold water and keep you quiet. It was late the next day when the doctor came. He looked at you for a moment, then shook his head and walked away.

"'I fear I'm too late,' was all the hope he gave us. 'You girls have done all you could, but such wounds as these needed better treatment.'

"He stayed with you until the next morning, and agreed to come back in a couple of days. He then told us you might pull through. All the

time you kept talking about the money and the bell strap, but we never thought once to look for it there. Speck had cut the strap and dropped bell, horseshoes and all in the corner of the corral, and there they lay until I went out and got them for you. You know what joy there was in the old ranch when we found the money. Miss Clark and I just hugged each other we were so happy, and we would have—"

"Well, say it, Blue Eye," said Miss Clark.

"Well, we would have hugged you, too, if the doctor had not been there. But I must tell you about Uncle Jimmy. Of course, he had seen a man shot up much worse than you were, and the weather was warmer at the time, too. When the money didn't show up he said it was an easy matter to lose that amount at cards, even in one night, and then shoot yourself to avoid suspicion. This angered the foreman so that he threatened to discharge the old man. After that he was very kind and agreeable. And Speck! That Dutch boy loves you as he does no one else. You should have seen what pleasure it gave him to turn over that draft to help make good your supposed loss. He knew if the money was gone you had been robbed, and no sacrifice seemed too great for him to make. Muggins, that dear old pony, shall have green pastures and a comfortable stable as long as he lives. 'Twas on him that we made our escape from the Indians, and he again proved his worth when he would not leave you when you fell by the trail. See those white hairs coming on the bottom of his neck? That was all raw there where those horseshoes rubbed him when carrying the money. We cared well

for him, giving him a pan of bread each day; and I'll tell you, Muggins," she continued, as she went and flung her arms about the horse's neck, "if anyone ever strikes or abuses you when I'm around, there will be trouble. I thought I loved my old Roany horse, but you are the prince of them all. Oh, say! What became of the snake you scared old Mrs. Tony and the drummer with?"

"I must have lost it while those fellows were chasing me. I will have to get another before I go back to Kit Carson. Those people over there think I'm a snake charmer, and I must be prepared to make good."

"Can you charm snakes—real rattlesnakes? How do you do it? We want to know," said both of the girls at once.

"Well, it's one of the easiest things in the world. First you find the snake—"

"Yes, of course, we know that; go on."

"All right. We will return to the ranch, and as we ride along I will tell you. Find the snake, then wait for it to coil; keep out of striking distance; take your sixshooter—"

"And then what?"

"Shoot its head off. The rest is easy."

CHAPTER XX.

The general invited me to spend the winter at the Rock Creek ranch. Blue Eye had told me she was going to stay there until Christmas, and perhaps longer, so I accepted the invitation, sent my bed and clothing over and was waiting for the boys to come in from the roundup.

Those who went up to the Meadows had returned and told us the Indians had cut the pasture fence in a number of places, burned the ranch buildings and destroyed the corrals. I told the foreman I did not feel strong enough to work that winter, so after making me promise to return in time for the spring roundup, he paid me off.

"You can stay here at the same wages, if you want to winter with us."

"No," said I, "that would not be right. I can't earn wages, and do not expect something for nothing."

"Well, it isn't that; you have earned the company many times what they have paid you. Come back whenever you want to, for I shall save your string of horses for you."

I thanked him, said "Klahowya" to all the boys, mounted Muggins and rode over to Rock creek.

"I'm mighty glad you have come," said the general, as I dismounted. "I was afraid Dan would persuade you to stay at the Three Bar. He is very fond of you, and I would not think of asking you to leave him if you were able to work,

but you are not. Blue Eye is going to spend the winter with us, too, so we will all pass the time here together. We have become so attached to you both that it would be lonesome without you. Go into the house and I will take Muggins down to the stable and feed him."

"God bless that kindhearted man," I remember saying to myself, as he led my horse away. Here was rest and a hearty welcome—a home with people in whose presence one could feel an attachment that was simply sublime; no false pride, but a love that was deep and lasting.

"Oh, we are so glad you have come," said the girls, as they came out to meet me. "We have everything arranged for that hunting trip, and were just waiting for you," and arm in arm we walked to the house.

"Getting impatient, were you?"

"Well, yes," said Blue Eye. "We expected you a week ago. There is a nice herd of buffalo just a few miles from here, and we must get them before they leave the creek."

"Sorry I kept you waiting, but I could not leave until all the boys got in; but I'm here and can go any time the rest of you are ready."

"We will go at once, for this is October, you know, and there is liable to be a blizzard any time. Nice weather yet, all right, but a week might bring a storm, and we will be gone almost that long."

"Then we will start tomorrow," said Miss Clark, as her father came up from the stable. I would be disappointed if we did not get to go. Can't we start tomorrow?"

"No, not until day after tomorrow. That will be Monday, and old Bud will be back to help with the work by that time."

"Two more sleeps, as the Indians say," said Blue Eye, "and one more day's target practice. Did I tell you we were getting to be experts with the sixshooter?"

I shook my head, and she continued:

"Well, we are, and if we run into a band of Indians—but there are no Indians in the sand hills now, they have all gone into winter quarters and are smoking their meat. When that is done, they have a big feast, then a fast, at the close of which a sort of inventory is taken, and the rations are doled out through the winter months according to the amount of provision on hand, and the number to eat it. A well fed Indian is generally peaceable, but a hungry one is vicious. They are too lazy to hunt or fish, except a day or two now and then, and when winter approaches it usually finds them with about half as much meat as they should have. When the snow falls and no game is to be had, they blame the paleface and commence holding councils of war. The young bucks at once lose control of themselves, if it might be termed control, and the peace pleas of the old chiefs are then as useless as they are eloquent. Those who have suffered from long marches and felt the sting of bullets, only go to war when forced to by the younger men of their tribe. If it has to be war, they know they must lead or be branded as cowards and shot. So it is fight the paleface or be murdered by the next of kin, who is only waiting to be chosen chief. I remember a council meeting held last year on

West Beaver. There were representatives present from nearly every tribe west of the Missouri, and such a gathering! Clothe an Indian with a few extra beads and feathers and a little authority, and he at once assumes an air indicating, 'the world is mine.' Of them all the Sioux are the greatest orators. The Bannocks and Nez Perces, of Idaho, are great pleaders, but not so eloquent. The Cheyennes and Arapahoes refer too much to self, while the Spokanes and Siwashes, of Washington, make up in grunts what they lack in words, but they all know when to cheer. At this meeting, Chief Gray Wolf, of the Sioux, made a great speech, but I could not appreciate it, as I did not understand their language well enough. He was frequently interrupted by the Siwashes and Spokanes, who marched around him and shouted, 'Skookum wau wau' (big talk). He told me afterwards that this was the highest compliment they could pay him. Their language is not susceptible of expressing greater praise. But I'm getting reminiscent and must stop. A Kentuckian cannot help admiring a great orator, even though he be an Indian. It's their nature. We are passionately fond of three things—eloquent speakers, fast horses and good songs."

"And we of the north," said the general, "love good entertainers, people who can tell us something new. Tell us more about those Indians."

"Not now. Their warriors are so terribly cruel that my feelings would overcome me if I were to continue. In moments of thoughtlessness I try to forgive them, but their wrong was too great. They have icy hearts, and their hands are

steeped in innocent blood. Come, Me-Me," she said to Miss Clark, "we must take Muggins a sandwich. Me-Me in Chippewa means beautiful, kind and innocent. Me-Me, fair one—but you are blushing, so I will stop. I must call you that, though," and she does, even to this day.

CHAPTER XXI.

The next day Tomato Charley and Speck came over bringing mail that had been sent to Kit Carson.

I received a nice letter from the Association at Denver, and a draft for the reward that had been offered for Fitz.

"Ye see," said Tomato Charley, "we hed a good excuse t' come. There wus letters t' bring, an' we kind o' wanted t' see ye all afore th' snow flies."

"We are going out after buffalo tomorrow," said the general. "Won't you go with us?"

"Wall, I guess we might jis' 's well 's not. Ther' ain't much doin' at th' ranch now, an' we tol' th' boss as how we might stay a week, ef th' atmospher' wus all right. We bro't an extra hoss apiece, so we'll jis' take a little vacation. Lots o' wild hosses 's well 's buffalo out beyant th' head o' th' crick, too."

"Is there?" said Blue Eye, "ever out there?"

"Yes'm lots o' times. Know them san' hills better 'n my neighbors."

"Well, I presume you do, if you have ridden the creek very often, for neighbors in this country are sixty miles apart, and the sand hills are piled on top of each other."

"Thet's it, an' one hill looks tis'zackly like th' other nearly, an' when yer lost, ye might as well try t' fatten yer hoss by feedin' him on 'is tail 's t' try t' tell one hill f'om th' other; yet ther' dif-

fer'nt some, I reckon. I r'member one time 's we wus comin' over th' trail, f'om Big Sandy an' we all got lost. Th' cattle 'd stampeded an' lef' th' trail, an' we couldn't find it no more. It got dark, we hed no water, an' th' hills all looked 'like. Wall, we 'd go one way 'while an' then th' other. Ev'ry rider in th' bunch—I think ther' wus six uv us, no, five—knowed th' way t' th' river. Wall, th' fact wus, not airy one uv us knowed which way it wus f'om us. We rode our hosses down, an' fin'ly we come crosst an imigrant wagon, an' th' feller showed us th' way to it. Choked! Jis' nearly dead fer a drink, an' I ast fer water."

"'Nothin' but col' tea,' sez 'e, 'an' I need thet.' An' he turned up th' can an' drunk it all hisse'f. Yas, took it all. I ast 'im why 'e didn't give us a swaller apiece, an' says 'e, 'Boys, ye cain't never git no sat'sfaction by scratchin' th' other feller's laig when yourn itches.'

"Wall, thet taught me two lessons. One wus t' take kere o' m'self first; 'nother wus t' study th' san' hills, an' never be 'thout somepin' t' drink. Now, I know all th' country, an' am never 'thout a can o' tomaties somewhare 'bout me, an' thet's how I got m' title; but th' tomaties has saved m' life more'n oncet, I reckon."

"And that is why the boys put the prefix to your name, is it?" asked the general.

"Yas, but I'd ruther be called a Piute than t' be thirsty an' have nothin' t' drink," and all agreed with him.

The next morning bright and early we all started up the creek. The party consisted of the general and wife, the two girls, Charley, Speck

and myself, and Pete, the Mexican, who did the cooking and drove the mess wagon. The first night out we camped at old Red's place, an old German who owned a small tract of land at the head of the creek. He was one of those who wanted to be alone, and wondered why other men did not go and take up a claim and live as he did. He owned no stock except a couple of saddle horses, and spent the summer months in the Rocky mountains prospecting. When driven out by the snow he would come down to his ranch and spend the winter there, living on buffalo meat, beans and crackers. For twenty years he had put in his time this way, and was still dreaming of the rich mine he would find next year. One corner of his cabin was piled full of queer looking rock, but the trouble with the old man was, he did not know quartz from sandstone. After showing us all his specimens and giving us a history of each year's travels, he got down behind his cook stove and brought out a piece of rock that he kept wrapped in his best bandana.

"Now, I vill show you some fine sbecimens," said he, as the kerchief was brought out.

"Well, what do you call it, Red?" asked the general, as he looked it over.

"Dond you know vot dot is yet? Dat vill make der piggest mine in der Rocky moundains alretty, und I go pack next sbring und make der logation. Vhen I pick upe dot specimen, I take him mit der expert to Tenver, und he say, 'Red, dot is fine. You can put a million tollars in dot brosbect, if you haf him."

"Well, now, we are not miners, but that looks like a piece of very common rock. There may be

a little bit of iron in it, but that is all. What did the expert call it?"

"Vell, he call him some new names, dot sounds bretty pig."

"Yes?"

"Yaw, he call him pyr'tes ufe assessment, und say vhen I haf some more pipe treams alretty I fin' some tings pretty quick oudt. Now aindt dot goot?" and he wondered why we all laughed.

"Red," said the general, "let me give you some good advice. Stop chasing pyrites of assessment, get a few cattle and settle down on your ranch. Here you have an abundance of water, free range, and could soon be a wealthy man if you would try. For twenty years you have prospected, and today you do not know ore from a cow's horn. That piece of rock will not assay ten cents a ton. Don't prospect any more, but stay here on the creek. I will give you a few cows if you will take care of them and the increase."

"Vell, I tink it over vonce alretty, und I let you know."

The next morning as we were breaking camp, Red came out and asked us to stop on our way back.

"I go down mit der railroadt vonce now to pring me upe some schmoke toback und ghrub. But you can shtay py ter ranch. You been velcome mit dot house."

"We appreciate your kindness, Red," said the general, "and we will probably stop as we come back. Now how about the cows? Do you think you can give up prospecting, and settle

down here and take care of a little herd of cattle?"

"No, I tink not. I go pack mit der moundains next summer, und I shtrike him rich."

"Well, one cannot help admiring the splendid, and even magnificent, way in which you go wrong. But I wish you well, and may your fondest hopes be realized. Good-bye, Red."

"Vell, goot-py, cheneral; you peen a goot man, und if der vas sum more hopes in dem moundains, I find him oudt vonce yet."

"I've knowed him fifteen y'ar," said Charley, as we rode away, "an' he gets fooler an' fooler all th' time."

"It would seem so," said the general, with a tinge of sadness in his voice, "but I may yet persuade him to change his ways."

We did not stop for lunch that day, but pushed on to a little lake which we reached about five o'clock in the afternoon, and went into camp. It was an ideal hunting ground for buffalo and antelope. Large herds of cattle and wild horses went there for water. Old Pete was busy with the evening meal, when Speck came rushing into camp so excited he could hardly speak.

"What's the matter now, Speck?" asked Mrs. Clark. "You didn't run into a mountain lion up there, did you?"

"Vorse as dot. Ven I climb dot santhill mit der glass I see sum Injuns und sum vhite men. Dey been coomin' up der drail vonce now alretty."

Charley took the glasses, and when the strangers came in sight commenced to swear in his native tongue—the Missouri language.

"It's Arkansaw Bill an' two big Injuns, sure's we're here. Now them fellers 'as been follerin' of us, an' I'm goin' down t' meet 'em an' fin' out ther' bizness."

"Hold on, Charley," said the general, "we were here first, and will let them make their wants known. This is a free country, and all have rights that must be respected. We will not bother them unless they give us trouble."

When Bill saw we were watching him, he made a few signs to his companions and they all left the trail, passing by us and disappearing in the sand hills, to the north of the lake.

"I vish I pull dot drigger vonce," said Speck, as he leaned the gun up against the wagon.

"You would have missed if you had," said I, "for they were half a mile away."

"Vell, ven I shoot dey coom closer mebbe."

"They 'll be clost enough 'fore mornin'," said Charley. "This little lake, which ye see, ain't no bigger'n a good-sized corral, much; it's all th' water this side o' ol' Red's ranch 'at I know uv, an' they got t' come here fer water. Can't ride a hoss more'n a day 'thout givin' 'im a drink."

Charley and I went out around the lake to stand guard while the other members of our party ate supper. Speck came out and relieved us, while the general and Pete staked the horses. The moon was now shining brightly and all was quiet save for the occasional roar of a mountain lion and the familiar howl of the coyotes.

"You and I," said the general to me, "will take the first watch, and Speck and Charley the

second. Now, all of you turn in and we will see that you are not disturbed."

I took the north side of the lake and the general the south. Cattle were all about us. Little bands of wild horses came near, but when they discovered us, whistled and galloped away. It was about ten o'clock when I saw a herd of buffalo coming, and called to the general.

"May be cattle," said he, as he dismounted.

"No, they are buffalo; I can tell by their wabbly walk. Ready, now, and we will get two of them." And we did.

"What ye shootin' at?" asked Charley as he and Speck came running around where we were. "Gone loco, er did ye see somepin'?"

"Well," said the general, "mine is a nice fat three-year-old buffalo cow."

"Mine is a yearling, and a big one," said I.

"Now, there you go," said Mrs. Clark, as she and the girls came out. "You bring us women out here to hunt and then go and kill all the game. The girls and I will stand guard now while you take care of your meat."

"Keep still," said Blue Eye, "there are horses coming. They proved to be wild horses, and we all felt easier again.

I brought saddle horses for the ladies and kept watch with them. After an hour's wait they got a shot at some antelope, killing one, and I took a shot at the same time at a big gray wolf that had sneaked in near the camp. They all went back to the wagon to rest awhile, and Speck came around after the antelope. I told him to come back and watch, and I would ride out north

a short distance to see if I could locate the riders who had caused us to stay up all night.

"You will not go alone," said the general, as he came riding up, so we went together. We rode northerly about two miles and found another lake, or water hole, which at this time of year was usually dry. It was yet quite dark, but we knew Bill and the Indians were camped there.

"Pete," said the general after we had returned to camp, "you may get us some breakfast, and we will return and interview those fellows. I thought last night we would pay no attention to them, but I think it better to see which way they go when they break camp."

"May I go, too?" asked Blue Eye.

"No, my child," said the general, "you had better stay in camp."

We ate breakfast, saddled fresh horses, and when ready to go Blue Eye mounted Roany and started with us.

"Hadn't you better stay here?"

"No, general, let me go along. I want to see those Indians; maybe I know them. Then, too, if we get near enough to hear, and they talk Sioux, I can tell what they say."

When we reached a little blowout, I crept up near enough to see they were cooking breakfast. They had shot a calf and were roasting meat. They were talking, but I could not understand what was said, so went back a few yards to where the general and Blue Eye stood holding the horses, and asked the girl to go with me. We crept cautiously along the edge of the hill till within about sixty yards of them. We listened a

few moments, when Blue Eye grabbed my arm and started back.

"Come," she whispered, "they are planning to kill us. They are talking Sioux, but I understand. They are going to round up all the cattle they can today, stampede them through our camp tonight, kill you men, and carry us women away. But they will not do it," and she stamped the sand with one of her feet.

"No, they will not carry our women away," said the general. "Blue Eye, you can ride up to the blowout, but keep well out of sight. Don't shoot unless it is in self defense."

The sun was just rising as we rode down, coming in sight of them from the west, while Blue Eye rode up from the south. We were within about eighty yards of them when they saw us, and in an instant each drew his six-shooter. We halted and called to them to put up their guns, and we rode up to their camp.

"Have you seen any buffalo this morning, boys?" asked the general in such a friendly way I was surprised at him.

"N-no," stammered Bill, as he made a motion to the Indians. "We 're goin' t' th' reservation, an' ain't lookin' fer buffalo."

"You are a dirty liar, sir, and you know it. We heard you talking a few moments ago, and I want to tell you now that the first order of business will be the stampeding of us instead of the cattle you were going to round up. If you are not a coward you will defend yourself. We have been watching you for the last hour, and after the threats you have made, would have been justified in killing you as we would a wolf, but

neither of us ever shot a man in the back, nor one that was not looking. Now you can do one of two things; fight, or send those Indians on to their reservation, and turn back to your home, if you have one."

"Oh, I'll go back, I'll go back. I ain't got nothin' ag'in either uv ye," and he commenced to jabber and make signs to his two companions. "No, we don't want t' fight ye at all."

"Hold on a moment, Bill, and we will have an interpreter here," and I called to Blue Eye to come down.

"Tell those Indians what they must do." But the sight of the girl was all that was needed to enrage the Indians, and one of them drew his knife and started toward her, demanding that she come with him or he would cut her heart out.

"Stop," said she, "or I will kill you instantly," and she pointed her sixshooter straight at his breast. He lowered his hand, stepped back a few feet and drove the long blade of his knife into his heart and dropped dead.

"And you; what are you going to do?" said she, pointing her sixshooter at the other Indian.

"Me go; me go quick. Me no like fightem paleface."

"Then go at once," and he made for his pony, which was staked a few yards away, and soon disappeared in the sand hills. Bill stood trembling like a leaf, anxiously awaiting the word that he might go.

"Get your horses, Bill," said the general, and lash that dead Indian on one of them and go with us. We have a spade at camp, and it will

be easier to take the body down there and bury it than to come back up here and do it."

After we had told those at camp of our experience, Charley walked over to Bill and spat in his face.

"There, now, ef ye take thet, yer no more a man 'an a skunk is. I've knowed ye fer fifteen y'ars, an' ef ye was dyin' now fer a drink, an' no water nigh, I wouldn't give ye a sup o' tomaties t' save yer life. Yer a crack shot, a bully, an' a bad man, so ef ye want t' celebrate a little, jis' say th' word, an' we'll go out b'hin' thet san' hill an' hev it out. I'm disgusted with ye. I thought ye'd fight when cornered, but ye won't. Git out o' me sight, an' ef I ever see ye ag'in I'll git some ten y'ar ol' boy t' torture ye t' death. Wouldn't fight a horned toad," continued Charley, as Bill put spurs to his horse and disappeared down the trail.

"Ought to 've killed 'im, but a man can't kill a snake when it's a-beggin'."

CHAPTER XXII.

The wind was now blowing quite hard from the northwest and was gradually growing colder. Our horses began to get uneasy, and we knew that within a few hours the storm would reach us and would probably last three days, but as we were within a day's ride of old Red's cabin, we concluded to stay and hunt until we got all the meat we wanted, and have at least one day's chase after wild horses. That morning we killed an old buffalo bull, took his robe and horns, then dragged the carcass up near camp for wolf bait. The sharp wind caused these animals to gather close about us, and, if possible, howl louder than before. We knew every wolf killed meant that many cattle saved, so the remainder of the day and half the night was spent shooting wolves. They came up to the carcass from every direction, and we all had a splendid opportunity to display our markmanship, which was up to the western standard.

The next day we rode far into the hills, but no buffalo could be found. After a long, hard chase we brought in a beautiful mare which we cut out of a band and roped. She was as black as any crow, and when broken was one of the most gentle and kindly animals I ever saw. The girls named her Beaut and made her the pet of the ranch. After supper that evening the general concluded there had been no real sport in killing the two buffalo the night before, so gave in-

structions to Pete to have breakfast early and prepare lunches and we would try again. The next morning he sent Speck and I east. He was to take the ladies and go west, Charley was to go north, and about noon all were to meet on a high sand hill some fifteen miles northerly from camp. If we did not return before dark the cook was to keep the lanterns burning and shoot off a gun occasionally to assist us in finding our way in. Speck and I reached the sand hill in due time, with a nice fat yearling buffalo strapped on our pack horse, and Charley came up an hour later with a big mountain lion skin tied on behind his saddle. We ate our lunch, but the general and his party did not come. We waited until about three o'clock and then started for camp, which we reached at dusk.

"Where's the general and party?" I asked as we rode up.

"Ain't seen 'em sence mornin'," said Pete, as he crawled out from under the wagon and commenced to stir up the fire.

"Then get us a bite to eat as quickly as you can, and we will go and hunt them. It is going to storm, and we must bring them in or they will suffer with cold."

"Yes, hurry up, Pete," said Charley. "We're nearly starved. B' th' time we saddle fresh hosses ye mus' have some coffee an' steak."

The wind blew colder and colder and snow soon commenced falling. We faced the storm and rode about half a mile apart, firing our six-shooters as signals to each other. We knew the wind would not change, and that by facing about could find our way back. We had been gone an

hour, perhaps, when the general and girls rode into camp from the south.

"Where are the boys?" they asked as soon as they got within hearing.

"I couldn't tell ye," said Pete, "but I 'spect they're 'bout ten mile out yander in th' storm. They come in, an' wus so skeered 'bout youins thet they jis' swallered a bite er two 'piece, changed hosses an' lit out a huntin' fer ye. It's no use t' fire a gun 'cause they couldn't hear it t' th' first san' hill there. But they'll git back, yer needn't have no fear 'bout them fellers. Come in th' tent, an' I'll warm ye up 'ith hot grub in a minute."

"Fix up a bite for the women," said the general. "I'm not hungry. I will go out and see if I can find the boys."

"Bring me a horse, too, general, for I'm going along," said Blue Eye.

"No, no, child, you can't go, it's too cold. I'll ride out a few miles and then come back. If they come in, keep them here."

"But let me go with you," she pleaded. "My only friend out in this storm hunting for me. I—I—must go."

"Blue Eye!"

"Please forgive me, Mrs. Clark. I did not know what I was saying. You are all my friends, and such dear ones, too."

"We knew you did not mean what you said, so stay with us. The general will do all that can be done."

"Yes, I know he will, but please let me go," and she knelt down and kissed Mrs. Clark, again asking forgiveness.

"Let her go, mamma, she will suffer worse if she stays here. Let us both go; we are not afraid of a little storm."

"A little storm! This is simply furious, and getting worse," said the general, as he came in.

"Both want to go? Now be sensible girls, and don't worry about those boys; they have been out in many a storm and will show up all right."

"Then why do you want to go out?" said Blue Eye.

"Because they will never quit hunting for us until they know we are safe. I will not be gone long. Keep the lantern burning and shoot off a gun occasionally."

He started out facing the storm, which was now almost blinding. We had ridden we knew not where. Two hours had passed since I had seen the other two boys. Muggins wanted to turn back, but I kept urging him on. Charley and Speck had kept near each other, and had concluded to turn back. They reached camp half frozen, and while overjoyed to find the ladies safe in the big tent, were sorry the general and I were still out.

"We'll change hosses ag'in an' go back," said Charley, "fer they'll freeze ef they don't git in. Awful storm, an' sich a sudden change, too. This mornin' didn't hardly need a coat, an' now a dutch oven 'th th' lid tied down 'ld hardly keep a feller warm. Worst blizzard I ever see this time o' y'ar. How long's th' gen'ral bin gone?"

"Well, it seems like an age, but probably about three hours. Yes, just about that long, for it is now nearly one o'clock. But we were to keep you here if you came, and not let you—"

"Yer want us t' stay, an' yer want us t' go. Now, ain't thet it?"

"I think they will surely be in pretty soon."

"But they might git here sooner 'f we fin' 'em. We'll jis' strike right out."

"Bless those boys," said Mrs. Clark, as they rode away. "I did not want them to go, but I could not bear to have them here, and the general and the Kid out wandering around in this awful storm."

"But if we only could go and help," said Blue Eye.

"I wish we might," said Me-Me, as both sat upon the ground with robes drawn closely about them.

I had wandered about until I hardly knew which way to go next, but felt I could not face the storm much longer. It was pitch dark and the sleet and snow had nearly blinded me.

"Muggins," I remember saying to my horse, "we will have to turn back. My hands are too numb to hold the bridle reins, so if you can find the way, strike out for camp."

I began to feel sleepy, so climbed down and walked awhile. I then took a drink of brandy, remounted and started on. I tried to shoot off my revolver, but my hands were too cold, so I put the weapon back into my belt. Muggins neighed and swung into a long gallop, but when he found he was chasing a band of wild horses he slowed down into a walk again, apparently as much disappointed as I was.

"I thought we had found them, Muggins, or they had found us."

"Just then the report of a sixshooter startled me. Muggins neighed again, turned sharply to the left and galloped up to a horse and rider, their heads bent low, pushing on facing the storm.

"Hello, there! is that you, general?" I called out, as soon as I got within hearing.

"For God's sake, yes, Kid, is that you?"

"Where are the ladies?" I asked.

"They are safe at camp, so let us face about."

"How are your face and hands?" I asked, as we started back.

"Frozen, I guess, for there is no feeling in them. I hope you are not suffering worse than I. Now another thing—"

"Well?"

"I hope Speck and Charley are as safe as I know the women are, and as we will be some time. Let's take a drink."

Out of the fullness of my heart I replied, and took a pull at his bottle that would have done credit to a Kentucky colonel, but the general went me one better.

"You see, I joined the Shriners not long ago, and they taught me a great lesson."

"Yes?"

"Yes. They taught me to hang on to the rope, and I haven't let go of anything since."

I suppose the general had referred to this to illustrate the strong grip he had on the bottle, but I was too cold to see the point, and we jogged on.

"Have you any idea where we are going?" I asked, "or which direction camp is from here?"

"No. We are drifting with the storm, and that is about all I do know. This little draw we are following will lead us to the creek, and I think we will strike below camp, but can't tell how far."

"What do you see, Muggins?" I asked the horse as he left the little trail we were following and went up to some object lying in the snow. I climbed down and discovered that it was a man.

"Quick, general, it's a man, and he is frozen stiff."

We raised him up, and in a voice that was strange and foreign to us, said:

"Not now, I'm a' right. Lemme sleep ag'in," and he fell back into my arms.

We gave him a drink of brandy and got him onto his feet, but he could not walk. Who he was we did not know, nor did we stop to inquire. We could not leave him there, so we lifted him across my horse, the general holding onto his feet from one side and I his head and hands from the other, and started on. The old wound in my shoulder was causing me intense pain, and I fear I worried the general some with my remarks.

"Pretty hard task, general," said I, after we had worn ourselves out slapping and hauling at our newfound companion, trying to rouse him up.

"Yes, but friend or foe he has got to go with us; we will take him to camp or die in the attempt. Push him off on my side, and we will give him what brandy we have left. He is limbering up a little, and we may save him yet. Hear that! Hold up the fellow's head while I fire my sixshooter. There! some one heard

that, for they answered. We will wait a moment and shoot again. Hurrah! a rider is coming. Now let's give the old fellow some more of the brandy."

"Hurry, Speck, it's them," said Charley, as he jumped down and commenced to shake our frozen hands.

"What's this ye've got."

"An old man we found back here almost frozen to death. If you know where camp is lead the way and help get him in out of the storm."

"Der camp's right here alretty," said Speck. "Don'dt yer see der light; ye've gone clear by it yet."

"You all go on 'ith th' hosses," said Charley, "an' I'll bring th' ol' feller in on me back. Purty heavy load, but I'll make it," and in a few moments we were at the tent door.

There were mingled tears of joy and gladness, but all was hushed when Charley walked in and laid the old man down on a rug by the sheet iron stove. We turned his face to the light and recognized him instantly.

"It's old Uncle Zach Foiley," said the general, as he turned and clasped my hand. "Kid, I thank God we were lost, for had it been otherwise this poor old fellow would have frozen to death. Get to work here, all of you; we must hold snow to his face and hands and feet, and draw the frost out."

"Don't you need some care yourselves?" asked Mrs. Clark.

"Not now; Uncle Zach first; we will thaw ourselves out later."

"He's a-comin' to all right," said Charley, as he poured a big drink of brandy down him.

"Good! I hope he isn't frozen as badly as we thought he was. But where is Speck; can't I keep sight of all the members of my family any more?"

"Ye kin snub t' me 'f I know," said Charley, as he applied another handful of snow to Uncle Zach's face.

"Never mind Speck," said Blue Eye; "he would have a fit if any of the horses would get their blankets off," and she pulled the flap of the tent aside and gazed longingly out into the darkness to make sure Speck had not wandered too far from camp.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The storm grew worse until noon the next day, and of course we all remained in camp. Our faces and ears were badly frosted, as well as our feet and hands. But no one complained; all were cheerful and happy. The horses were kept blanketed and given every care possible, so they did not suffer much, except for want of feed. The wind went down with the sun, but the air was quite cold.

"We will have a nice day tomorrow," said the general, "and the horses can get plenty of grass. Not such a bad storm after all. Been out in worse blizzards than that, haven't you, Uncle Zach?"

"Yes, but none 'at seemed to chill me plum t' th' morry, like this 'n' did. Guess I'm gittin' too ol' t' stan' 'em like I used to."

"Yes, you are too old. What were you doing out here in the hills, anyway?"

"Wall, I'll tell ye. Ye know we hadn't seen each other sence we scouted t'gether, five, mebbe six y'ars ago. Ye saved me f'om th' Injuns a few times, an' I saved yer scalp oncet or twicet, I reckon. Wall, I thought I hed fought Injuns long 'nough after thet hard campaign on th' Big Sandy an' 'cross t' th' Julesburg water holes. Ye r'member as how ye wus only a cap'n then an' me a lieutenant, an' how we 'lected ye general uv all th' enlisted men in Colorady? Ye went t' Chicawgo, an' I went back t' m' ranch on South

Beaver. I settled down thar an' went t' work a cuttin' posts an' a-fencin'—a little more tobackie an' a match—I got t' smoke er I cain't talk good. Wall, purty soon, thet is, a little ev'ry y'ar, I got m' place fenced, an' th' cattle kep' a-growin', an' I jis' got fixed up comf't'ble like. Th' latch string t' ol' Uncle Zach's house allus hung out. Th' boys 'd stop an' eat m' grub th' same when I wus home 's when I wusn't. Wall, 's I said, I got fixed like, an' hed 'bout a hunderd head o' nice cattle, all gentle, an' two strings o' eight hosses each, all good uns, when th' Injuns swooped down on me las' summer, an' they cut m' fence, killed an' scattered m' cattle, stole all m' hosses but th' one I wus a-ridin', burnt m' house an' stable, an' all m' hay an' corrals. They didn't leave me nuthin'. I wus flat broke an' thought how these things hafter be; an' I sez, 'Uncle Zach, ye must git out an' fin' a place t' stay this winter. Yer busted. Yer ain't got a cent. Ef houses wus sellin' fer thirty cents, ye couldn't buy a pane o' glass, an' 'f beef steers wus only wuth a nickel, ye couldn't kiss a jack rabbit's hin' foot. Ye'll hev t' move on.' Wall, I rode over t' th' Bar T. ranch an' stayed thar 'while an' fin'ly I hear'd ye'd come back west, an' wus over on Rock crick, an' I sez, I'll jis' ride over an' see th' gen'ral an' spen' a few days a-swappin' ol' stories, an' incident'ly git a few squar' meals an' some tobackie, an' feed fer me hoss. Wall, jis' as I got t' th' stables an' wus goin' ter call ye t' let ye know 'at Uncle Zach 'd come, an' fer ye t' kill th' fatted calf, I hear'd some fellers out back o' th' corral talkin' Sioux. Now, yer Uncle Zach ain't much on

good ol' English as she is spoke, but when it comes t' Sioux, I'm a perfessor, with a LL. D. attached 'ith a di'mond hitch. Wall, I jis' kind o' sauntered close by, an' I reeco'nized Arkansaw Bill. He looked su'prised like, but kep' right on talkin' an' I walked away a little an' 'peared t' be tendin' t' m' own bizness, but I hear'd it all. They wus goin' t' foller ye an' kill all but th' gals, an' wus goin' t' carry 'em off. They didn't say no names, but after they'd gone, I axt th' boys who wus up th' crick a-huntin', an' they tol' me. Sez I, 'Uncle Zach, you air a dam coward ef ye don't foller up an' see 'at a lot o' yer frien's ain't kilt.' So I jis' saddled a fresh hoss, an' lit out. Wall, I missed th' trail, somehow, fer it wus night, jis' dusk, when I started. I hadn't had nuthin' t' eat sence breakfas', an' Bill an' th' two Injuns wus 'bout three hours ahead o' me. I wus a-ridin' hard 'bout sunup, jis' nearly mornin', when m' hoss goes inter a badger hole, an' over we went. Thet's th' las' thing I reckerlect, but I didn't fergit thet; I knowed it all th' time. Sence thet, I've slep' on goose hair an' fur robes, jis' outside o' dreamlan', waitin' t' be cut out, branded an' put in th' big corral. You fellers foun' me, brought me in here an' woke me up an' spoilt th' whole bizness, but then I'm not kickin'. Ef I'd a-landed 'ith th' angels, they couldn't 've treated me no better'n you hev, an' ef I'd been put in th' big corral down below, ther' wouldn't 've been no snow t' draw th' fros' out o' m' feet an' han's with. So, 's I sed, I'm not kickin' any. Did ye see Bill an' th' Injuns?"

We told him our experience with them, and he continued:

"Wall, then I'm sorry fer one thing, an' I hope t' live long 'nough t' set eyes on thet vill'in ag'in. I'm seventy-nine pas' las' September, an' never kilt a man in col' blood, not even a Injun, but I'm li'ble t' go wrong 'f I see Bill ag'in. He oughter bin kilt long 'go, fer then we'd hev less trouble with Injuns. He he'ps t' start 'em on th' warpath, then hides out till th' fightin' 's over. Did anybody swipe m' ol' Winchester while I wus dreamin'? No, thet's it, an' 'bout th' best breas' pertector a man kin hev. It p'longs life, insures soun' sleep an' pleas'nt dreams, an' I've knowed one appl'cation to cure bad cases o' rheumatics, hoss stealin' an' ind'gestion. But I guess I'm a-tirin' uv ye. Mighty likely gals here with ye, General; all your'n?"

"Well, yes, Uncle Zach, all my family. Here now, the girls have made you a hot Scotch. We have enjoyed your talk and are sorry we were the cause of your present sufferings. We are very grateful for the effort you made to warn us of the danger, and if kindness will repay you, I promise the debt we owe you shall be paid in full."

When we awoke the next morning we knew the storm was over. We remained in camp, however, nursing our chilblains, giving the horses a chance to feed, for they were hungry, and made preparations to start home. We had planned to stay another day, but Uncle Zach's feet were causing him so much trouble we concluded we had better take him home and send for a doctor.

When we reached the ranch the boys were arranging to start up the creek after us, for they feared we were lost.

"Mighty glad ye all got in," said old Bud, as he rode out to meet us. "Bin mighty oneasy 'bout ye all 'long. Wouldn't o' worried 'f th' wimen hed bin here, but I jis' 'llowed they'd suffer 'ith th' cold, an' mebbe git snow blin'. Air ye shore yer all right, all uv ye?"

"Yes, Bud, we are all safe and sound," said Mrs. Clark. "That is, all but Uncle Zach. His feet are so badly frozen we are uneasy about him, and must have a doctor as soon as we can get one."

"Pore feller! If I'd a bin here when he started, I'd a gone with 'im, but I wus away, down toward th' river a bringin' up th' cattle. I knowed it wus 'goin' t' storm, though, by th' way m' corns hurt. I can allus tell. I got a corn on th' little toe o' m' right foot, an' one next to th' little toe on t'other, an' I have t' keep parin' uv 'em down twicet a week anyway, an' I bin a-fig'rin' a little lately on them corns—a hunderd an' four cuttin's a year, an' as nigh as I kin r'member, I took off th' first crap 'bout forty-three y'ars ago. Now, 'llowin' I took off quarter uv a inch a month, er a little less, mebbe, I'd a hed three magn'f'cent flag poles now 'bout a hunderd foot high 'f I hadn't cut 'em away parin' at a time."

"Yes?"

"Yas. An' I 'llowed ef they'd a-growed in size, thet is, big 'roun', as fas' 's they growed up, it'd a took all o' th' gen'ral's hosses to haul 'em up an' sot 'em in th' groun'. An' I bin thinkin',

too, w'at a waste o' en'rgy an' strength an' wearin' uv m' knives it wus t' keep 'em cut off."

"And waste of corns, too," said Mrs. Clark, as she dismounted and told Bud to take her horse to the stable.

"Ever have corns, Mrs. Clark?" But she had gone into the house, and did not reply.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The horses were soon in the stable, fed, and the meat we had brought home with us put away. Uncle Zach had been carried into the house and made as comfortable as possible. His feet were frozen so badly he could not walk, but he was as cheerful as any one about the house. When asked if he suffered much he answered:

"Wall, yas, but then 't wouldn't do no good t' make a fuss 'bout it. Ye see, it's like this: 'f I kin keep m' min' on som'thin' else, I fergit th' pain, an' I'd ruther hear a good story 'an t' hear m'self gruntin' an' complainin'."

Charley hurriedly ate his supper and started to Binkleman for a doctor.

"I'll fetch 'im by day after tomorrie, Uncle Zach, so be 's patient 's poss'ble. It's purty dark an' gittin' colder ag'in, but I'll make it all right, an' ye don't need t' worry 'bout me," and he waved his hand back at us as he disappeared in the darkness.

"Thet cigar smokes s' easy like, I think I'll take 'nother', gen'ral," said Uncle Zach, as he rocked himself up a little closer to the fire.

"Ah, thankee! It's th' same Chicawgo bran' ye used t' hev when we scouted t'gether. Better'n I'm used to, an' ef this don't put me t' sleep—wall, 'nother one an' a nip f'om th' brandy bottle will. Why don't ye go t' bed? I kin keep th' fire goin'. Ye don't hev t' set up 'ith me."

"Well, it's like this, Uncle Zach, the Kid and I are not sleepy, so we will stay up and keep you company. Hadn't you better lie down awhile?"

"Not yit. I wus too busy a-thinkin'. Want t' hear 'bout some o' me exper'ences ag'in?"

"Certainly; take a fresh cigar and start in."

"Ah! Thet's great. Sort o' soothes me like, an' eases me pain some. Ye know, gen'ral, we've bin t'gether a good deal, an' I bin 'ith th' Kid here a few times, I reckon. Ye trusted Uncle Zach, allus foun' 'im on th' squar', but neither uv ye knowed who he wus er where he come from. Now, I'm goin' ter tell ye, fer wrapped up 'n me busom is a secret, an' ef th' feed gits short, an' we hev a hard winter, I'm likely not t' pull through. I wus born in th' ol' south lan', an' a right likely yearlin' I wus, too, an' me min' nacherlly wanders back t' me ol' Varginny home. I went t' school some, then learnt th' tinner's trade. I didn't like thet, so I read th' Bible through four times an' preached a little. Next I studied law, then worked in m' Uncle's bank erwhile; then I went back t' th' farm. When ol' Josh Hooper moved to Arkansaw, I felt lonesome like, an' foller'd up an' went t' work fer 'im on a mule ranch. Susie was th' oldest gal, a little younger'n I wus, five y'ars, mebbe; an' I might's well tell ye' we jis' nacherlly fell in love. Now, ef ye know me, an' I think ye do, ye know yer Uncle Zach never done nothin' by halves. I jis' started right in t' marry thet gal. She said wait erwhile, an' I waited. I fin'lly got th' day fixed, but she said, 'Zach, wait erwhile. Ye know I'm young yit, an' we better wait a y'ar.'

"Wall, I jis' waited. I jined th' rush t' Colorady, 'Pike's Peak er bus',' an' when Susie wrote me erbout two y'ars later thet she wus ready, I jis' writ back t' tease 'er like, 'Wait erwhile.' But I borried some money an' went back an' we got marri'd an' started west at oncet. I worked at th' mines on Cherry crick, right clost t' Denver, an' made a little money. Then I lost me claim after spendin' all our money fer court fees an' lawyers, then pulled stakes an' went t' Idaho. We stopped near Silver City an' I went t' work, but th' long trip overlan' 'ad broke me down. I kep' workin', though, an' in erbout a y'ar we hed a good placer claim, an' two babies, twins; yes, a boy an' a gal. Wall, when they wus 'bout six months ol', I left 'em t' go t' Winnemuckey fer supplies, an' when I got back th' Snake an' Piute Injuns 'd bin on th' warpath, an' f'om thet day t' this I've never seed 'em, er knowed what come uv em. I've gone back mos' every y'ar sence then to moisten th' ashes where our house wus burnt, but each visit makes me more sad an' lonely. But me feelin's is gittin' th' start o' me. Sort o' 'fects ye some, too, don't it?"

"Yes," said the general, as he brushed away a tear, "but go on."

"Want th' rest o' th' story? Wall, 'nother cigar an' ye shall hev it. Now, there ain't no man as can say Uncle Zach has wronged 'im. But I owe lots o' debts jis' as I do you—fer keepin' an' hoss feed an' tobackie. I've worked hard, but th' Injuns 'as robbed me an' burnt me out s' often, I'm erbout done fer now. Another leetle nip o' brandy, an' raise me feet a little. There.

But I ain't giv up yit, an' mebbe I'll git a little start ag'in, fer I kin do mos' any kind o' work. I've follered ever'thing f'om mule culture t' savin' souls, an' I reckon I kin turn me han' t' somethin' ag'in. An' I want t' tell ye—fer I've tried both an' ought t' know—ef it's clippin' kewpons er mules' tails yer choosin' fer a perfession, clip th' kewpons. It's more prof'table an' not so danger's. But ef I knowed me wife an' babies wus gone, I would be ready t' go, too. Sometimes I think mebbe they're livin' yit, an' ef ye ever hear uv 'em, go an' git 'em, fer I know ye'll treat 'em kind. What wus it, gen'ral, thet Shakespeare said 'bout yer wife, the woman ye love?"

"She is mine own,
And I as rich in having such a jewel as twenty seas,
If all their sands were pearls,
The water nectar, and the rocks pure gold."

"Thet's it. An' a home like th' one painted in th' book o' Brahma. What does it say?"

"When the one man loves the one woman, and the one woman loves the one man, the very angels leave heaven, and come and sit in that house and sing for joy."

"An' I loved th' one woman, an' she loved th' one man all right, fer she went t' th' brink o' th' grave t' bring me th' babies, th' faires' forms I ever knowed. My God! Who wouldn't give up even th' wealth an' power o' th' world fer childern uv 'is own? 'Fer uv sich is th' Kingdom uv Heaven.' An' now, gen'ral, here's a paper; me las' will an' test'ment. It's Rabelais's, but it suited me case, an' I jis' 'dopted it fer me own. Ye'll be my exec'ter 'thout bonds."

The general took the much worn paper from the trembling hand and read:

"I owe much, I have nothing, I give the rest to the poor."

We carried the old man to the couch, covered him with blankets and robes, and he was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXV.

It was noon the next day when Charley reached Binkleman and dismounted in front of Rubidau's store. It was snowing, the wind was blowing hard from the northwest, and it was bitter cold.

"Whar's ol' Doctor Sawem?" asked Charley, as he rushed into the store, hardly stopping to greet the boys—a dozen or more, who were hovering about the stove.

"The doctor's over on Burntwood," said Parsley, the liveryman, who happened to be at the store. "Don't think he'll be back t'night, either, fer the storm'll be in 'is face an' he ain't much more'n got there by this time. Step down by the stove, and drink some hot Scotch, while I put yer hosses in the barn. Had anything ter eat?"

"Not sence supper las' night, but thet don't bother me much. Ye see, we wus all up on th' head o' Rock crick a-huntin' buffalo, an' got caught in th' big storm, an' while we wus out, we foun' ol' Uncle Zach jis' nearly froze. We got 'im down t' General Clark's place, an' he's 'bout done fer, an' th' only hope ter save 'im is t' amp'tate 'is feet, an' thets got t' be done quick."

"Ye give yer hosses a' awful ride, Charley, both too tired t' eat," said the liveryman as he returned to the store.

"Yas, I reckon I did, an' ye must keer well fer 'em an' git me two uv yer best goers ready as soon as ye kin. I'm goin' fer th' doctor."

"No use, Charley, ye couldn't fin' 'im, an' ef ye did th' ol' doc 'uld never start out in sich a storm."

"That's right," said the storekeeper, a big fat, good-natured Frenchman, who always favored delays, especially those which kept the boys at his store. There were card tables, plenty of "oh-be-joyful," and a nail keg at the end of the bar that he used for a cash tray.

"Don't rush off; hev 'nother drink. Come up, boys; yes, I'll git in meself. Ye see, Charley, we all love Uncle Zach, but what's th' use o' you freezin' fer one like 'im?"

"I'll eat some, an' then I'm goin'. Ef I fin' th' doctor he'll jis' come 'long, 'cause I come after 'im," said Charley, as he turned to go. "I like yer comp'ny, but I mus' keep me promises."

"He'll not coom, ah," said Sewer Sewerson, the big Swede from the "J. B." ranch, on the Platte. "I tank it been too cold," and all agreed with Sewer.

"No use, Charley, come an' have a drink 'ith me," said another of the boys. "Ye c'n then go an' eat a bite an' we'll put in time at cyards."

"Jis' look out; she's a three-day-an'-night storm, all right."

"Ye'll hev two o' yer bes' hosses ready in fifteen minutes, Parsley, fer I'm goin' to Burnt-wood, soon 's I eat," and he left the boys holding their glasses and wondering if he really intended going.

They watched him until he crossed the street, and saw him go into the Old Valley hotel.

"He's safe, boys," said the storekeeper. "Ye know th' widdy 's sweet on 'im, don't ye?"

"Sence when?" asked Bar T. Ike.

"Oh, way las' winter. She nu'sed 'im through a long sick spell an' they've ben as chummy as two skimmed-milk calves ever sence. Didn't ye know thet?"

"Well, now thet do settle it. He'll not go then, fer her firs' man froze in no worse a blizzard 'an this. Here's to th' widdy, th' mos' likely heifer in town," and the glasses clinked while the proprietor raked over another silver dollar and dropped it into the nail keg.

"Charley, me b'y," said Mrs. McGrady, as he entered the house, "how air ye? It's han'somer yer gittin' ivery day," and she took Charley by the arm and led him up to the stove.

"Ye'll hev me some dinner 's soon 's ye kin, fer I got t' go t' Burntwood fer th' doctor," said Charley, as he held her warm hands, blushing from one corner of his mouth to the other, which meant from ear to ear.

"Ye'll shtay b' me warm shtove till th' shtorm is over. Ye remimber me dear brother, Moike, an', an' me husban' that wus only marri'd to me a few wakes, don't ye, Charley? 'Twas a shtorm loike this, an' in th' afthernoon two years ago this very month that they froze, an'—" But she covered her face with her apron and commenced to cry.

"There now, there now, thet'll do," said Charley, as he stroked back a curl that hung down over her forehead. "They didn't know th' road

an' got lost. But how's th' dinner? I'm hungrier'n a wolf. Ain't hed a bite sence las' night 'bout six-thirty."

"Oh, it's all riddy now. Come in," and she took a chair beside him. "An' it's a moighty hard time I've had, too. Yer 'bout th' only rale frind left me, an' yer 'goin' t' shtay wid me a few days t' kape me company. Ye look so much loike me darlint husban' I've a moind ter kiss ye."

Charley did not reply, but asked about the different riders who had stopped at the hotel the past week. Continuing, he said:

"I think I'll be back b' twelve t'night. Ye'll be kind 'nough to hev a good fire an' some hot coffee, fer we got t' go on t' Rock crick. Don't cry, now, 'tain't a very bad storm, an' I'll be back b' midnight, I reckon."

"Och, Charley, I beg of yez not t' go. If you'll—"

"Mary, I must go. Don't ask me t' stay. Thet pore ol' man'll die 'f I don't git th' doctor. There, now," and he kissed her and disappeared around the corner of the house.

She watched him mount and ride away, and as she looked she feared he would never return.

It was getting dusk when Charley rode up to the Wilson ranch and called out: "Is Doctor Sawem here? Then please tell 'im ter come out."

"Good evenin', Charley, good evenin'," said the doctor, as he opened the door. "Better git yer hosses in th' stable, an' come in out o' th' storm. Gettin' furious, ain't it?"

"I want ye t' come t' Rock crick with me t'night, t' ten' ol' Uncle Zach. He's froze nigh to death, an' ye've got t' go an' amp'tate 'is feet 'r he'll die. Git ready, right away."

"Can't go fer an hour, anyway. They's a new baby just arove here, an' I've got to watch 'ith th' little feller 'while, an' give some orders fer th' care o' th' mother. Go an' feed yer hosses, an' come in an' git a bite t' eat. My sakes—awful storm!"

When Charley had put his horses in the stable, he went into the house and received a kindly greeting.

"Didn't suffer much," he said, in reply to a question as to the weather. "It'll be wuss goin' back, fer we got t' face it; but I reckon we kin stan' it, can't we, doctor?"

"Well, we can try. If we fall by the way—well, we fall by the way, that's all. Eat a bite an' we will be goin'."

When the horses were brought out the doctor hesitated for a moment, but finally mounted and they were off. The wind was sweeping over the high divide at a thirty-mile gait, and the snow was falling faster than ever. They could not see the trail, so bending down over their saddle horns, they pushed on.

"It wus a great ride we made," said Charley, as they rode into the barn, almost frozen.

"Come on, Doc, we'll go down t' th' hotel an' git somethin' t' eat."

"Be the howly St. Patrick, 'f ye ain't back; an' it's a good, hot fire I've got fer ye," said Mrs. McGrady, as she extended a hand to each.

"'Twas the ghosts o' ye both I could see, whin I shet me eyes. Ye'll drink some hot coffee, now, an' ate th' lunch I've saved fer ye, an' shtay in me house 'til marnin'. It's a woman that knows th' worth of a good man whin she's lost wan, an' it's purty close to me ye air, Charley," and she sat down on his lap and put her arms around his neck.

"I reckon I am, Mary; but ye better jar loose, fer th' doctor 'll be back in a minut'. He jis' stepped out fer a drink."

"Och! Ye'll not think me forward, docthor. I wus jis' lookin' afther th' comfort uv me guest here."

"Never mind, I think a little o' that'd help t' warm me up."

"G'wan, now, an' none o' yer back talk. An' what do yez want—a bid?" said she, addressing the big Swede, as he entered the hotel office and took a chair by the stove.

"No, I tank not. I coom ter see if Charley got back. Yas—hello, Charley; how air ye? Better ye hide out, fer Arkansaw Bill's over 't th' store, an' he do you upe. Goot night!"

"Now, I reckon I ain't lost no trouble, but Bill mus'n't try ter stampede me t'night," said Charley, as he moved around to the side of the table so he could face the door. When he had finished eating, he drew his pistol, examined it carefully and replaced it in his belt. As Bill and he had always been good friends, the remark of Sewer did not excite the doctor and Mrs. McGrady, they thinking it was a joke.

"Ye'll excuse me a minut' till I walk over t' Rubidau's an' git a bottle o' brandy, an' in-

c'dent'lly t' see how th' storm is. Ye'll be ready in fifteen minut's, doctor, an' we'll start fer Rock crick."

Bill, having no idea that Charley was in the country, had drifted into town with the storm, and finding the usual gang at the store had told them of his troubles during the Indian excitement; also how he had made the general, Charley, Speck and I apologize for riding across the trail in front of him, and that it would be his particular business whenever he met one of us to see that we ate a little dirt for the amusement of the boys.

Charley walked into the store, but Bill not noticing him, called for another drink. As the glasses were raised, he said:

"Thet's jis' what I'll do, make 'em eat dirt. I'm a bad man from Arkansaw, an' never leave a trail. Raised a pet an' gone wild!" and he drew his sixshooter and took a couple of shots at some tinware at the farther end of the store.

"Then I guess I'll tame ye a little," said Charley, as he walked up and placed his hand on Bill's shoulder.

The crowd scattered, dodging behind boxes and barrels, for all knew Charley, and expected Bill to make good, but he didn't. He was so excited that he dropped his sixshooter, and looked the coward he really was. Charley had not drawn his revolver, but from the position of his right hand could have done so quicker than I could tell it.

"My boots 're a little dirty, Bill, an' I reckon ye'd better git down an' lick 'em off. There's a little froze grease on 'em, but mebbe that'll do

ye good—might kind o' quiet yer nerves. Air ye gittin' down? Ye'll lick me spurs, too. They may stick t 'yer tongue some, they're so cold, but ye'll do a good job. Now ye kin hike. No, come back an' git yer gun. Tell th' boys ye like boot grease." Bill obeyed. Charley turned to the barkeeper, bought the bottle of brandy, and as he turned to go, said:

"I'll now bid ye good night, fer I got t' take th' doctor t' Rock crick; an', Bill—" but Bill had slipped out through the back door. "Well, tell Bill, 'f ye see 'im, thet I'll be back 'bout Chris'-mas an' I'll give 'im 'nother job o' lickin' my boots, 'f he's got any tongue left."

He bade them good night again, walked back to the hotel, leaving the worst disgusted crowd he had ever seen in his life. Men in those days despised a bluffer, and made no attempt to conceal their hatred.

"Some people's bad off b'sides what ails 'em," said Charley, as he walked past the doctor, who had fallen asleep by the office stove, and took a chair beside Mrs. McGrady in the dining room.

"'N phat's that?"

"I wus thinkin' uv Bill. Mebbe he's a little drunk, so 'f 'e comes in, give 'im a good, warm bed, fer it's too col' t' sleep out."

"I will thot. Now, howld shtill. I b'lave yer ears 're frosted, Charley."

"Yas, Mary."

"Do ye love—"

"Hosses ready!" yelled the liveryman, "an' I wisht ye'd come on. Ye kin chaw each other's

necks some time when they's nobody standin' out in th' cold half froze a-waitin' fer ye."

"I reckon we'll make it in b' six o'clock tomorrie night," said Charley, as he buttoned his coat and started out. "Come, doctor, th' hosses 're ready," and both were soon bending over their ponies' necks to protect their faces from the terrible storm.

CHAPTER XXVI.

At the ranch we could only wait and watch for Charley and the doctor. The hours grew longer and longer, and we feared they were lost in the snow. Uncle Zach had borne his suffering bravely, but had gradually grown weaker. We could not get out to assist Charley and the doctor in any way, for we did not know in what direction to go.

"No use to think of going," said the general, when I asked if I had better not ride out a few miles and see if I could find them. "They may come up the creek, and they may come across the sand hills. I wish we might assist them in some way, but I fear we can't. All we can do is wait and hope they will get here all right. This evening at six will be forty-eight hours since Charley left, and he is either near here now or hopelessly lost."

"Den it's only dree hours ven dey coom alretty," said Speck, as he got up and looked out of the window for the hundredth time. Old Bud came in occasionally to warm and tell us about his corns.

"I knew it 'd storm hard, fer I kin allus tell. Ever have corns, miss? Sure sign uv a storm when they hurt. May be a long time a-comin', but it'll come."

"No, Bud," said Blue Eye, "I'm not troubled with corns."

"Troubled? W'y, sometimes I think they're a blessin'. One corn 'll make ye fergit yer own troubles, two 'll make yer fergit yer naber's troubles, an' three's a circus an' Indian war dance c'mbined. An' anybody 'at 'ld want more'n three good, ambitious corns 't a time ought t' be 'rested fer hornswoglery."

"What's that?"

"Wall, thet's what I call Christian science. I took it oncet fer corns. The feller says, 'Now don't think o' yer corns, an' they won't hurt.' Wall, I thought, 'Mr. Johnson (his name wus Johnson), you air a liar,' an' even while I wus a-thinkin' thet short sentence, th' corns wus hurtin' right 'long. No, they didn't even stop while I wus a-callin' him a liar."

"But you had no faith. You know the good book tells us if you have faith you can remove mountains."

"Yas, but 't takes a good, sharp knife 'long 'ith yer faith t' r'move corns. But I'd better go an' see after th' hosses. Mighty bad storm, an' th' snow 's drifted in all th' stalls. I jis' come in t' tell ye as how Beaut got 'er front foot over the hitch rope an' burnt 'er laig a little, an' t' git some lin'ment. Don't be skeert; she ain't hurt much. She'll be all right in a day 'r two." and he started back to the stable.

"Corns, corns," said the general, as he threw up his hands and leaned back to laugh. "Corns! Well, I'm glad he has relieved himself about his corns. I knew it was coming; he never fails to lecture us on corns when it storms. Annoy you, Blue Eye?"

"No, not in the least. He is so kind to the horses that I overlook his corn troubles. I could love anyone who is kind to my pets."

"Dey's a-coomin'! dey's a-coomin'!" shouted Speck, as he rushed in waving his hat and throwing snow all over the room. "Right down dere," and he started out to take their horses.

"Come in to the fire, boys," said the general, as he clasped their hands. "The hours have seemed long, and we are glad the suspense is over."

"How air ye, Uncle Zach?" said Charley, as he shook the old man's hand.

"Not very well. I've suffered some, but not 's much 's you hev, bein' out 'n th' storm. I wisht ye hadn't o' went, fer I don't think th' doctor kin do me any good, an' I'm sorry ye both suffered so on my 'count."

The doctor glanced over his shoulder at Uncle Zach, then shook his head. Finally he went over to the couch, took the bandages from Uncle Zach's feet, felt his pulse a minute, then turned back to the fire.

"You've done all that could be done, general, but 'is strength's almost gone. There's only one chance t' save 'im, an' that is by amputatin' his feet. If you think best, I'll do that as soon as my hands are warm enough t' hold the knife."

"Doctor, we have sent for you, and if it is in your power to save the man's life, I want you to do it. Can you stand the shock, Uncle Zach? The doctor says the only chance you have is to amputate your feet."

"Yas, gen'ral, I kin stan' it. Hev 'em cut five feet six inches 'bove th' soles o' me feet. Now I'm not complainin' ner tryin' t' dictate to ye, but jis' suggestin' what 'ld be bes' fer me. Ef I live after hevin' me feet cut off, I'd be a burden t' you an' yer fambly, so ye'd better do th' cuttin' jis' under me chin."

"Poor old man!" said the doctor, after he had given him the anaesthetic. In a few moments the operation was completed. Both feet were taken off just above the ankle joint. It was midnight when Uncle Zach revived and called for the doctor.

"I knowd ye wouldn't do 's I tol' ye, but it's all th' same, fer I'll soon go to me long sleep. Sorry I can't pay ye now, doctor, but I got some cattle out on th' range somewheres, an' nex' summer the boys'll ship 'em an' pay yer bill."

"The general has just given me a check fer two hundred dollars, so you don't owe me anything."

"God bless that man. He is one that age can't wither, ner custom stale his infinite variety. General, come here, an' tell th' folks t' come, as Uncle Zach wants t' shake hands with all of ye."

It was two o'clock the next morning when the doctor closed Uncle Zach's eyes and told us he was dead. Being almost exhausted from the worry and excitement of the past week all retired except Speck and I, we remaining up to keep watch over the body of our old friend.

The next morning a coffin was made and lined, a grave prepared, and the body of Uncle Zach was laid to rest. Blue Eye read the Episco-

pal burial service and the general delivered the funeral oration. Although there were but twelve of us, all stood with bared heads for an hour in the storm, listening to the tribute to that old pioneer. After reviewing the life of old Uncle Zach and his associates, the general said:

"He feared God and loved his fellow man. There are others who have braved as many dangers as he, some whose bodies show as many scars from Indian arrows and bullets, but none among them who had a more kindly heart. The names of our pioneers were not born to die, for they have beaten the trails and assisted in keeping the Indians on their reservations, that settlers might build their homes upon these lands; but it was ever thus. The foundations of states are always laid on aching hearts. It is said Blucher the morning after a great battle would ride over the field, and when his attention was called to the upturned faces of the dead, would say, 'It has to be so. Those men were born for that. That is the way civilization works out its advancement.' This poor human life does not seem to be of much value in the economy of nature, and no mortal can figure out, unless he raises his eyes to heaven, anything like a reasonable compensation for this life's work. I remember an engagement over on the Platte where we fought the Indians for nine hours. Half of our company were killed or wounded, and after the battle was over Uncle Zach took a little babe in his arms and rode two hundred miles back into the settlements to find it a home. He thought nothing about his own safety or his wounds—that babe should have a home. Its

parents had been killed, and he risked his own life that the child might be saved. Again, when we were following a band of Indians up the Big Sandy, who had been killing settlers and burning their homes, we came to an immigrant camp, the sole survivor of three families being a little girl about five years old. She was hid away in the corner of one of the wagons. After we had buried the mangled forms of the dead, Uncle Zach took the child in his arms. 'General,' said he, 'give me a leave of absence; I must take this babe to Kit Carson and send her to the orphans' home at Denver.' The child looked at him a moment, then said:

"'I don't want to go with you; you killed my papa and mamma.'

"'No, my dear,' said Uncle Zach, 'the Indians killed them.'

"'No they didn't; they just knocked them over, and they would have got up and took care of me if you hadn't dug holes and put them in the ground and covered them up.'

"Have you ever seen a mother weep over her babe? Her grief was no greater than Uncle Zach's when he found he could not convince the child that we did not kill her father and mother. But we sent her to Denver, and I thank God she has learned to know we were her friends. Each year Uncle Zach sent her money, at times going hungry that the child might have better advantages. He took no praise for his good deeds. He only did what he thought was right, and trod with the masses the humble ways of life. The people of the great West are the beneficiaries of

the sacrifices of his life of duty. So absolutely true and honest, I cannot but realize the thought of the witch bound champion of Scott's legion:

> "I'd give the lands of Deloraine,
> Dark Musgrave were alive again."

CHAPTER XXVII.

I left the ranch immediately after the death of Uncle Zach, and spent a month in the hospital at Denver. My shoulder was causing me so much trouble that I resolved to have the bullet cut out and carry it in my pocket instead of under my shoulder blade. This done, I returned home and found everything had gone well at Rock creek. Blue Eye had grown more handsome during my absence, and I often mentioned the fact to her. But when I spoke to her of love and how near and dear she was to me, she would reply that she was grateful for what I had done for her, and she hoped to be able to repay me in a small degree.

She had such a happy way of avoiding my questions that when I commenced talking of love, she replied as though I had been talking of some one else. Thus the winter passed, and although determined to get some expression from her before I should leave, I finally gave up all hope and planned to go back to the Arickaree to begin work. She had told the general and his family of her great love for me, and although I knew this, I could not get her to say so to me. She went to Mrs. Clark for advice as though she were her mother, and when she asked what she should say to me, Mrs. Clark replied:

"Go to him and tell him you love him, for I know you do. He has surely proven himself

worthy, and you should not keep him in suspense any longer."

"Well, when he asks me again I will," she said, after a moment's reflection, but she did not.

"You will return next fall and spend the winter with us," said the general as I was taking my leave. "We will keep Blue Eye, and while we expect to see you during the summer, when the roundup is over you are to come back."

Blue Eye came out, patted Muggins on the neck, then waved her hand until I disappeared around a bend in the creek.

"Afraid you might not come back," said Dan, as I rode up to the Three Bar ranch that evening and asked if he had kept a place for me.

"Thought maybe you might stay with the general, but glad you didn't. You are better acquainted with the southern range (meaning south of the Arkansas), so I have concluded to send you and Charley down there. You are to bring back everything that belongs up here, no matter whose brand it wears."

I knew this meant a three months' trip in a country I was not in love with, but I made no reply, except to ask when we were to start.

"Tomorrow. You can take the Johnson string of horses, the best there is on the ranch, unless it is Charley's string. Our wagon will be at Los Animas about the first of July, and I will send you both some fresh horses."

It was the fourth of May when Charley and I started for the southern range, with two of the finest strings of nine horses each that ever crossed the Arkansas. The foreman knew there was hard work before us, and selected the best horses

that wore the Three Bar brand. We camped the first night out on the south fork of the Republican, at the point where I had camped when returning from Kit Carson with the money. The bones of old Tige, my old pack horse, lay near, bleaching in the sun.

"I allus hate this ride," said Charley, as we packed our beds the next morning, and started for Kit Carson.

"Sixty-five miles 'thout water kind o' makes me dread th' trip. But we ought t' make it b' half pas' three, 'nless we hev a sick hoss er somethin' t' bother us. I wus jis' a-thinkin'," he continued, as we pushed the horses into the trail ahead of us and started out, "uv th' trip I made over this trail with th' Bar T. kid summer 'fore las'. We wus a-comin' up th' river with th' roundup, an' it wus th' boy's firs' trip out, an' besides 'e wus young an' tender, not more 'n fifteen. We called 'im Si. He'd hired t' thet outfit t' wrangle hosses, but 'e got t' thinkin' 'e 'd make a snake charmer. We'd all tol' 'im t' let snakes 'lone, but 'e wus smart like an' kep' a-foolin' with 'em. Wall, down at th' mouth o' th' Lansman he gets bit, but I think it wus a bull snake, fer it never made 'im sick, an' I guess this kind o' made 'im brave. He kep' a-tellin' us as how a rattler 'd bit 'im, but we knowed it wusn't. We worked up this side o' th' Bar T., an' wus camped by th' big prairie dog town on th' wide bottom, jis' this side o' th' pastur'. We 'd warned th' lad t' keep 'way f'om the dogholes, but he wanted a big prairie rattler—an' he got one. He wus a-ridin' 'long an' he sees a big yaller snake a-sleepin' on a prairie dog moun'

so 'e throws 'is quirt at 'im, an' th' snake crawls into 'is hole, all but 'is tail. Now, ye know w'en a snake goes into 'is hole, he allus leaves 'is tail a-stickin' out a little, an' doubles back so 'at 'is head 's right by it. Th' boy didn't savy this, so 'e jumps off 'is pony, runs up an' makes a grab fer th' snake's rattles, but 'e didn't git 'em. No, 'e never touched 'em. Jis' 's 'e made th' grab, th' snake pulled in 'is tail an' struck th' kid on th' wrist. Wall, 'is arm commenced t' swell an' he got sick, an' th' worst uv all wus we didn't hev a drop o' licker in th' camp. If we'd a-had some licker, I think we'd o' saved 'im, but we didn't have any, so th' on'y thing t' do wus t' take 'im t' th' railroad. Th' foreman turns t' me an' says:

"'Charley, you take Si to Kit Carson,' an' we started. We got up 's fur 's th' Tuttle ranch an' th' boy wus s' sick 'e couldn't ride hoss-back no furder. There wusn't no one 't th' ranch but th' ol' Scotchman—Scotty, ye r'member 'im —an' nary a drap, 's he put it, 'bout th' ranch. He give me th' ol' buckboard, an' two cayuses 'bout half broke t' wagon, an' th' cussedest, meanest hosses ye ever see, an' we started out, leadin' me saddle hoss behin'. I wus a little 'feared th' ol' bronks 'd give out er sulk on me, so I led th' saddle hoss, knowin' we'd be sure t' make 't in. We'd rolled Si in a bed an' put 'im in behin', fer 'e couldn't set up, an' away we went. We come 'long here an' over t' th' nex' raise there mebbe, at 'bout a two-forty gait, when th' bronks flagged the'r tails. Ther' wusn't 'nother run left in 'em. Si 'd kind o' raise up on 'is elbow an' say, 'A little faster, Charley,' then he'd lay down agin. We'd

jog on a while with me a-hammerin' them bronks on th' back. Purty soon he'd ask agin, 'Can't ye hurry a little, Charley?' but ther' wusn't a hurry left 'n either hoss. Then he'd lay down an' I'd lam them inter a little trot. Wall, we fin'ly got to Sand crick, an' I couldn't make them hosses go no furder. 'A little faster, Charley,' Si would say, an' there we wus, stopped dead still. I jis' jumped out an' grabbed Si in one arm, this way like, an' mounted th' ol' saddle hoss an' struck out carryin' th' boy. I looked back purty soon, though, an' I tell ye what's a fac', there went them dam' bronks a runnin' away 'cross th' prairie. Wall, bye an' bye, they circled 'roun' an' come inter th' trail 'head uv us, an' beat us t' town four mile', head an' tail up an' a-kickin' at th' place where th' dash board ought t' be. Mad! Now I bin tol' I wusn't a expert at nothin', but I'll challenge th' world, Mizzury included, t' perduce a man thet kin do a cleaner, more up-to-date an' soul-relievin' job o' swearin' at hosses 'an I did. Ther' wusn't no stammerin', an' me words flowed free an' easy. But soon I felt sad ag'in, fer Si' d say, 'Hurry, Charley, can't ye make 'im go a little faster?' Wall, I kind o' felt sorry, an' when I looked th' boy in th' face I knowed he wus a-dyin'. I clum down somehow, a-holdin' th' boy, an' laid 'im on th' groun' an' hel' 'is head on me knee. I thought I'd orter pray fer 'im, but I kind o' choked up, somehow, fer he'd keep a-sayin', 'A little faster, Charley,' jis' whisperin' so 's I could hear 'im. I couldn't stan' it t' see th' boy die thataway, so I picked 'im up, mounted me ol' hoss an' rode on. Si wus a good innercent boy, an' me heart wus sad.

I tried t' talk to 'im some, but me throat 'd choke up, an' I guess I cried a little, fer I loved thet boy. Pore Si, I couldn't save 'im."

Charley stopped talking for a few moments, and although he rode with his face turned from me, I could see him brush away the tears. I think the moisture came to my eyes also, for I had known the kind hearted lad of whom he spoke.

" ' Please, Charley, hurry,' wus th' las' words he spoke t' me, fer 'e died 'bout four mile this side o' Kit Carson. I carried 'im on int' town though, an' we buried 'im jis' back o' th' section house. His arm 'd swelled nearly 's big 's 'is body an' turned black 's me boot; an' though I've bin over this trail a hunderd times sence thet, me lef' arm allus feels tired 's I ride along here, an' I kin hear some one a-whisperin' t' me, 'Please, Charley, hurry.' Now, I don't know how ye feel 'bout sich things, but ef it's givin' to yer frien's t' revisit the places o' the'r youth, after gittin' in th' big corral up there, then th' spir't o' Si's ridin' weth us now. When it's night, I kin see 'im smilin' an' happy, but 'n th' day time he rests gently on me left arm, jis' 'nough t' tire 't a little, an' whispers t' me, 'Please, Charley, hurry.' "

CHAPTER XXVIII.

When we reached Kit Carson, we found the usual hangers-on about old Tony's place, but none of them cared for our company.

"Begorra, Kid," said old Tony, as we stepped into the saloon for a cigar, "Ye'll hev one wid me. It's thra toimes ye've bin kilt sence ye wus here, so ye bether take a little pizen on th' house. Arkansaw Bill has kilt ye twisht, an' ould Sandy, th' Mexican thot wint over t' head ye off an' git yer money kilt ye wance, but Bill's shtill talkin', an' I guess it's in hiven where Sandy is now, fer we had t' roll 'im in tin foil t' make 'im hould licker whin 'e got back here. Yis, it's Sandy thot's dead, fer we planted 'im out there wan moonth ago tomorrie."

"Gwan now, ye dago shnake charmer," said Mrs. Tony, as she grabbed up her apron and swung it over her shoulder. "Gwan now, an' it's ye thot'll not come near me table."

But we were too hungry to pay any attention to the threats she made. The next morning she took a seat at the foot of the stairs, and amused those present with her version of the snake and the drummer. After breakfast we paid our bill and started down Big Sandy for Los Animas, stopping that night with old Sam Queer, near the Indian battle ground. The old man, I think, was really the queerest person I ever saw. He wore his coat buttoned up the back, and gave as his reason for it that the Indians couldn't tell whether

he was going or coming. The rest of his clothing was worn in almost as absurd a fashion.

"Yas, I guess I'm queer, an' prob'bly ought t' be, fer thet's me name. Now out there's me wagon. Ye see th' hin' wheels 's afore, an' thet's 'cause I'm queer. As t' me clo'es—wall, I've foun' th' hip pockets o' m' pants handiest fer m' gun on this side. When ye see me ye ought t' know m' name 's Queer, an' ye don't haff ter ax. I hed a neighbor oncet, up in Ioway, b' th' name o' Guess, an' he wanted t' sell 'is place an' come West 'ith me. Wall, he advertised 'is place fer sale in all th' papers, an' tol' how t' git to 'is house, but didn't give no names. By'm bye a feller comes 'long, an' axes ef thet wus th' place thet 'e seed advertised fer sale, an' wus tol' it wus.

"'How much do ye ax fer it?' he says.

"'Four thousan' dollars,' says 'e.

"'How many acres have ye?'

"'One hunderd an' sixty, not countin' th' hog lot an' tother side o' th' road there by th' side o' th' crick.'

"'What's yer name?'

"'Guess.'

"'Guess?'

"'Yes, Guess.'

"'Guess an' be damned! I might guess a life time an' not guess right,' an' he drove off so mad he wouldn't take th' place. Now, nobody 's got t' guess at my name. They know it's Queer, an' I don't lose no trades on thet 'count. Yer fond o' music, ain't ye boys?" he continued, as he waved his hand toward the organ, which occupied a prominent place in one corner of the

room, but without waiting for us to reply, went on: "Wall, I am too, but 't depen's on 'th kin' o' music 't is. Ef there's somethin' in it, w'y I'm jis' charmed. Ther' wus a feller back in Ioway thet worked fer me a long time, what had th' mos' melojious voice I ever heared. He could sing Pig-o-ee 'ith all th' variations. When he'd git t' goin' an' tuned up t' th' proper pitch, th' hogs 'd come a-squealin' an' runnin' out o' th' woods like they wus a jinin' in th' chorus. An' I tell ye ther' wus melody fer ye, an' no brass ban' I ever heared cud make as sweet music t' me 's thet wus."

"How wus thet?" asked Charley, somewhat surprised at the old man's idea of music.

"Wall, because I owned th' hogs," said he, as he got up, stretched himself and sauntered off toward the corrals, leaving us to amuse ourselves as best we could.

"Onless it's ol' Bud up on Rock crick, I think thet's the foolest man I ever see," said Charley, as we rode away the next morning.

"W'y, I tell ye, Kid, ef I'd stay 'roun' him erwhile, I'd be saddlin' me hoss wrong en' to, an' ridin' back'ards. But t'night we'll stop at Charlie Malone's place below Los Animas. Fine place. Folks jis' like General Clark an' wife; allus glad t' see ye, an' two o' th' sweetes' little gals I ever see—Nona an' Helen. I allus take 'em out fer a hunt er t' fish ever' time I go there. They ain't on'y 'bout ten an' 'leven y'ar ol', but they 're perfect little ladies. Know 'em, do ye?"

I told him I had known them nearly all their lives, and was very much in love with them.

"Wall," he continued, "I ain't s'prised much, fer ye wus down here so long. They jis' seem like little sisters t' me."

We crossed the river at Los Animas, stopping long enough to wash the dust from our throats and give the riders who were loafing about the public square a chance to admire our horses.

The "barkers" were out, telling how easy it was to break the monte bank and how much one could win if he was lucky, but we passed on. Arkansaw Bill had come south ahead of us, and had told the boys what he would do to us if we ever crossed the river he was named after. He left town the day before, however, which was very fortunate for all concerned, and had gone to work for the Lazy S. outfit on the Picket Wire.

"As a frien'," said one of the boys, when telling us of the threats Bill had made, "ye'd better keep yer shootin' irons close by. Bill claims t' be workin' fer th' Lazy S., but he's simply a tool o' th' Lardo thieves f'om near th' bad lan's. Ye know 's well 's I do, I guess, there's lots o' northe'n cattle down here, an' certain riders has sworn veng'ance ag'in anybody 't 'temp's t' move 'em back t' th' home range. Now, you fellers ain't down her' fer nothin', an' I ain't never seen one o' ye hit th' back trail, but I jis' thought I'd drap a word so ye'd be on th' watch. I'm a southern rider m'self, an' I've seen things. Ef ye've never seen things, hev a look; ef ye hev seen 'em, look ag'in."

We thanked him for his information, turned our horses back into the trail, and were soon jogging along toward Malone's.

"'Ef ye've never seen things, hev a look; ef ye hev seen 'em, look ag'in.' Now, Kid, what d' ye think o' thet? Ain't Bill a fierce bird? Ye don't haff t' answer, but I tell ye this: Th' firs' steer thet Bill er any o' his gang cuts out on me, there'll be somebody goin' to' th' great beyon'."

"I don't fear Bill, Charley," I replied, "but those Lardos are desperate fellows. I know them, and we must watch them closely; but here's our sweethearts coming up the trail," and we lifted the girls from their ponies and carried them back to the ranch on our knees.

"How are you, girls? Glad to see us?"

"Fine. Yes, awfully glad you've come. We were just talking about you both. You will have to stay a week and go hunting with us, and we will gather wild flowers for you and just have a fine time. Papa and mamma will be glad to see you, too. We know where there are some young mountain lions, and you must help us get them for pets."

"Well, well," said Mrs. Malone, as she came out to shake hands with us. "Charley, you are as homely as ever, and Kid, you seem to have grown older. Turn out your horses and come in and rest yourselves."

We remained at the Malone ranch almost a week, waiting for the roundup. We caught a couple of wildcats and a young antelope for the girls, but no mountain lions. When riding out one day we ran across a large band of five and six-year-old steers, branded with skull and cross bones. It did not require very close examination to discover that they had been burnt over other brands. We reported this to Mr. Malone, and

learned that a man by the name of Steel—Lysome Steel—claimed them.

"Wall," said Charley, "he can lie-some, er lie a 'hole lot ef 'e wants to, but anyway, he lies when 'e says e' owns them steers. We're goin' t' round 'em up, make 'em swim th' river here an' sen' 'em north, whar they b'long."

After sending word to the foremen of the roundup that we would meet his outfit at Los Animas, we went back near the Steel ranch and found the steers were being close herded by a Mexican. We told him we intended to take the steers, and to our surprise he agreed to help us. Steel had not paid him his wages, would only give him two meals a day, and he wanted to leave the country and go north. We relieved him, telling him to go back to the ranch that night, ride his own horse the next day, cross the river at Los Animas, and we would have the cattle on the other side ready for him to start north. But we did not get them across that night. The river was running bank full, and although we got them started several times, they would "mill" and turn back on us. I drowned one of my horses, and Charley came nearly going down himself. All night long we yelled and worked with those cattle. We thought of taking them to the bridge, but a wild steer fears a bridge worse than water; and besides, the whole town would have known what we were doing. The next morning we hired a couple of riders to assist us, and after numerous attempts finally got them over. By noon the Mexican was pushing them out over Homestead bottom toward the head of the Beaver, where we had told him to leave them. We then started out

and met the roundup a day earlier than we expected. We threw in all the skull and cross bone steers we found, as well as all other cattle that belonged north. At night our cattle would be cut out and turned back down the river. We complained to the foreman, and he told us the only way we could prevent it was to stand night herd ourselves. This we did for a month, Charley staying out with the regular night men the first half of the night, and I the other half. Still we lost a good many. They frequently stampeded for apparently no reason, but it was evident that a majority of the riders were in sympathy with the rustlers. Numerous bets were offered that we would not get out of the country with steers enough to pay our wages, but when a bunch of a dozen northern riders appeared who had not been announced, cut the roundup and drove away about a thousand big beeves we had gathered, a majority of the men who had been attending to the cattle became abusive, and tried every way possible to start a fight. But no such thoughts entered our heads; we had no idea of being anything but agreeable. Our principal reason for this was that about a dozen of the riders were fellows who had come from the bad lands with records. Then, too, we had been sent there to bring back certain brands of cattle, and were gathering only what belonged to the association we represented. The first roundup was finished, but the last had not been so successful, and we felt discouraged. When the second started, assistance had been sent us, and although we worked farther south and were among more desperate characters, we returned to Los Animas with a

nice herd. Here we waited for a few days for our wagon to come down and bring us fresh horses, and also instructions for the next trip. Charley and I, with other northern riders, had thrown our cattle across the river and gone into camp with the J. B. outfit from the Platte. We went over to town nearly every day to get our mail. On one of these trips I was struck on the head with some heavy instrument and stabbed in the back. Charley was standing at the general delivery window, only a few feet from me, and as he turned a bullet cut off the tip of his left ear. We had not noticed the crowd behind us, and when questioned no one knew who had assaulted us. I was carried across the street to a doctor's office, my wounds dressed, a carriage ordered, and I was taken to the Malone ranch. The doctor accompanied us, and when Mrs. Malone asked as to my condition, he replied:

"The wound in the back is very serious; the knife passed through the shoulder blade and went deeper than I thought it had. Follow the instructions I have left and I will call again tomorrow."

CHAPTER XXIX.

Charley remained with me a couple of days, then went to Los Animas and wrote a letter to Blue Eye, hired a colored boy to carry it to Rock creek, and then started south with the roundup. The boy left the trail for a short cut across the country, lost his way, and after wandering about in the sand hills several days, finally reached the general's ranch.

"Am dis heah Gin'ral Clahk's ranch?" said he, as he dismounted, and stood leaning over the wire fence looking at Blue Eye and Me-Me, who happened to be out in the front yard.

"Yes, sir."

"Am de Gin'ral to home?"

"Yes. Would you like to see him?"

"Oh, I guess I ain't spec'ly pa'tic'lar 'bout 'im."

"Why did you ask, then?"

"Well' I thought maybe he might want t' pond'rate wiv me some. I come on urgenticly business."

"Very urgent business?"

"Yassum. An' I reckon it r'quires dirastic movements on de paht o' one o' you gals. Am one o' youse named Blue Eye?"

"Yes, sir; but what do you want?"

"Well, I jis' reckon yo've got a very prognosticatin' lettah heah, which I fetched ober."

"A letter for me? Who from? Give it to me, quick."

"Am you pos'tively shoah yo' name am Blue Eye?"

"Yes. Give me the letter. Who sent it?"

"Tomatah Chahlie an' I toted it f'om Los Animas. What fer you git so excited? You heah 'bout de shootin' an' stabbin' wif knives? Yo' peah to be gittin' mighty awful pow'ful nervous."

"Who's shot? Who has been stabbed. Give me the letter, quick."

"Oh, don't git rambunkshus. Spect he's sho' 'nuff dead, fo' Ise bin los' three days, an' on de trail fo' moah days."

"Who's dead—Charley?"

"No, dat fellah w'at come down dar wiv 'im."

"The Kid! Has he been shot?"

"Worser as dat. Cut plum t' pieces f'om heah t' heah," and he drew his hand across his body from shoulder to hip.

Blue Eye clutched at her hair as she fell backward, but the general, who had just come out, caught her and eased her to the ground.

"What does this mean—what can be the matter?"

"Papa, that boy has a letter for Blue Eye. Make him give it up, quick," said Me-Me.

"Have you a letter for this girl?"

"Got one heah somewhar, suh; but ain't tizactly shore which pocket I put it in, suh."

"Well, I'll soon find out," and the general caught the boy by the arm and commenced to turn his pockets inside out.

"Why did you keep the girl in suspense, you little scoundrel? I have a notion to cuff your ears."

"It's ver' impo't'nt dat dis heah lettah mus' done be deliv'd to de right pussen, suh, an'—"

But the general had the letter and was kneeling beside Blue Eye, whose head was resting in Me-Me's lap.

"Oh, read it to me, quick, general; quick. The suspense will kill me."

"Be a brave girl, then, and I will read it."

"'Dear Miss Blue Eye: I speckt ye'd better come down an' help nuss th' Kid. Pore boy! He's stabbed in th' back, an' 'is skull's crushed in on th' side uv his head. The doctor says as how it 'll be nine days afore he knows fer shore he'll live er not. This is Sunday. I don't know ther date, but ye'd better come quick, fer he'll want ter see ye. I jis' found out thet it wus Arkansaw Bill what stabbed 'im, an' I'm goin' south on 'is trail. Ye needn't hurry too much, fer he's at th' Malone ranch, an' our sweethearts air takin' kere uv 'im. I hope he'll live till ye see 'im, er longer. I send this an' me luv to all uv ye by Nigger Mose, the only boy I kin hire ter go. Charley.'"

"Mamma," said the general, after he read the letter to his wife, "you must help us get ready, for we are going down to see the Kid. But somehow I dread to go, for fear we may not get there in time to do him any good. You all wonder how it happened? Well, I can tell you. Some cowardly villain has sneaked up behind him, struck him over the head with a revolver, and stabbed him in the back with a dirk

knife. It might have been Arkansaw Bill, or it might have been some one else. Hurry, now; have the cook put us up lunch enough for three, for both the girls are going with me."

The look on Blue Eye's face had now changed to one of determination. She assisted in getting things together, and when the horses were brought out of the corral, thanked old Bud for his assistance in saddling and packing her horses.

"We ought to reach there sometime tomorrow evening," said the general to his wife, as they rode away. "I will send a message back at once, that you may know we arrived safely, and also how the Kid is."

It was quite dark when they reached the Beaver, where they found water and went into camp for the night. They ate their lunch, rolled out their beds and the girls retired; but the general lighted a cigar and walked back and forth along the bank of the creek, watching the horses.

"Why don't you lie down, papa? We fixed your bed for you, and you ought to get some sleep."

"I'm not sleepy, so I'll stay up and look after the horses. They seem afraid, and don't feed well at all. There! Hear that one snort. I'll take the Winchester and go out and see what's the matter." He returned in a few moments, leading the pack horses, and as he knelt beside the girls, said:

"Come, we must get out of here. We are camped within a few rods of an Indian village, and they seem to have taken possession of the creek. There appears to be about fifty of them,

and to avoid trouble we will move out onto the divide."

The horses were gathered up as quietly as possible and thrown into the dim trail that led south, and they were soon climbing the little rise about a mile from the creek. The general was riding in the lead, followed by the pack and extra saddle horses, with the girls bringing up the rear.

"Glad we got out of there, general," said Blue Eye.

"Yes, but you had better keep quiet awhile yet; those Indian may have pickets stationed out here to guard the trail."

Just then the horses stampeded; the girls rushed up and saw that someone had jerked the general from his horse. They gave a shriek, but what to do they did not know. Backward and forward the men swayed, fighting as hard as they could, neither having spoken a word. Blue Eye grasped her sixshooter, but soon replaced it in her belt, fearing if she fired she would hit the general.

"Stop!" cried the general. "If you make a move to strike me again I will blow your brains out. Who are you, anyway?"

"Me big brave White Cloud. Damn coward pale face. Scalp hang White Cloud's belt."

They stood glaring at each other for a moment through the darkness. White Cloud then made a lunge at the general, but fell face down in the grass. The general blew the smoke from his sixshooter, struck a match, bent over his dead foe, looked at him for a moment, then, turning to the girls, said:

"I'm sorry I had to do it, but I could not get out of it any other way. He has stabbed me twice, and the only wonder is he did not drive that long knife blade clear through me. Let's get our horses and ride on. There may be others lurking about here, and I hardly think I could resist another attack like that."

The horses were quickly rounded up, for they had not gone far, and, taking positions as they were when the Indian attacked them, left the trail and started southwest. After riding a few miles they stopped, and the girls bound the general's hand and arm.

"Are you hurt much?" they asked, as they dismounted and commenced making bandages of their handkerchiefs.

"No; but my flesh creeps when I think of that big Indian and that long bladed dirk. He struck me on the head with something, and before I recovered, jerked me off my horse. I'm sorry I had to kill him. There, see that!"

"Yes," said Blue Eye, "and I know what it means. Look! See this one here. They are signal fires. The Indians at camp know something has happened, and all the guards must go in and report. White Cloud, as he called himself, won't show up, and when they find him we had better be somewhere in the neighborhood of Kit Carson."

"Just midnight," said the general. "We will continue on southwest, and either strike the railroad or the trail from the head of the Republican. Either will lead us to Kit Carson. We will leave our pack horses there, and the ride we will make down Big Sandy will be a record breaker. We

will only take the two horses from there we haven't ridden yet. Not a word, now, and keep as close to me as you can."

CHAPTER XXX.

It was just breaking day when they rode up to the section house at old Tony's and asked for breakfast.

"An' faith, I b'lave it's gypsies they air," said Mrs. Tony, as she watched the girls wash the alkali dust from their faces and braid up their hair. "An' travelin' wid me ould fri'nd. Th' top o' th' mornin' to ye, gin'ral, fer it's a foine man ye air, an' th' bist Injun foighter this side o' Dakoty. But phat's th' matther? Ye musht 'ave had a bad shpell o' th' nose blade, fer yer shmeared from head to fut."

"Nothing serious at all, Mrs. Tony. Have our breakfast set out as soon as you can, for we want to make Los Animas today," and he joined the girls in the wash room. Mrs. Tony followed and kept on talking.

"Ye same t' be in a hurry. Phat's th' matther? Air ye 'lopin' wid th' gairls ye hov here?"

"Yes, but they are my girls, so I hardly think anyone will attempt to stop us."

"Gwan, now. Ye're not aven marrit," and she gave him a poke in the ribs with her thumb, threw her apron over her shoulder and went out to hurry up the cook.

Breakfast was called, and she took her usual place at the foot of the stairs and told them of a young "blaggard uv a shnake charmer who'd shpi'lt th' repetation uv her hotel."

"But he's got worse 'an a shnake boite this time. It's dead we heared he is. Thin we heared ag'in it was on'y gangrene (God be praised fer the color) set in an' he may live."

"When did you hear from the Kid?" asked the general, and the girls stopped eating and held their breath, waiting for the answer.

"Yishterday."

"How was he?"

"'Twas alive he was yit, but moighty low. He's aither did be this toime er he's a-livin' yit, but I can't tell fer th' loife uv me which wan it is."

The girls got up and left the table and when the general came out, were wiping their eyes.

The extra horses had been turned into the pasture just south of town, and all was ready for the long ride down the Big Sandy.

"Saddle Beaut for me, and Roany for Blue Eye," said Me-Me.

They bade Mrs. Tony good-bye and were soon headed down the river, each leading an extra horse. It was considered a hard day's ride to old man Queer's ranch, but they reached there by noon, having changed horses once. Would their horses hold out? Could they themselves stand the ride? Their faces showed plainly the anxiety they felt, but the saddles were quickly changed and they started on.

"Our sweethearts are taking care of him," said Blue Eye, talking aloud to herself.

"Well, I don't care if the Kid has a sweetheart down here, if she will only take good care of him," said Me-Me, and Blue Eye looked up in surprise.

"I didn't intend you should hear that."

"I did, though," and both rode on in silence until the general halted to change horses again.

When they started on, Blue Eye continued:

"Now, I'll tell you, Me-Me, you are younger than I, and may not take matters as seriously, but I'll tell you, nothing will make me cease loving that man—neither one sweetheart nor a dozen, for he has been too kind to me. I shan't say a word to him about it till he is strong, but we will have it out then."

"You won't quarrel, I just know you won't. You love each other too well for that."

"I hope we won't quarrel, too; but the suspense must end. The strain is killing me."

"He has told you he loved you, hasn't he?"

"Yes, many times; but he has referred so often to his little sweetheart down on the Arkansas that I have not given him an answer yet."

"Has he asked you to marry him?"

"Y-e-s, he has."

"Why didn't you accept him then?"

"Well, because—"

"What?"

"As I have told you, the marriage vow is a solemn one. You remember what old Uncle Zach said to your father about the one man and the one woman, the night before he died, don't you?"

"I can't recall it now."

"'When the one man loves the one woman, and the one woman loves the one man, the angels leave heaven and come and sit in that home and sing for joy.'"

"'Twould be that way with you and the Kid."

"It would be on my part, but do you think I would receive all his love?"

"Yes, I do."

"I wish I did; but those sweethearts haunt me. I feel sometimes as if I would like to—"

"Let's change horses again," said the general, "and get a drink here at the bend of the river."

But the look on their faces startled him.

"Why, what's the matter? You mustn't give up now. It's three o'clock, and we should be there by seven."

"Oh, we have plenty of strength left; we were just talking about the Kid, and our feelings got the start of us," and as they turned their faces the general brushed the tears from his own eyes.

"I've been thinking of him, too, and never before have I felt such an anxiety for anyone. I would to God—" Here he stopped, for his throat seemed to fill up so he could not talk.

"I'll ride Roany on in," said Blue Eye. "He is so big and strong and is carrying me so easily. I wonder if that isn't the Malone ranch over there. Take the glasses and look. I believe it is, but here comes a fellow we can ask."

"Good evening," said the general, as he raised his hat to the rider. "Can you tell us where the Malone ranch is?"

"Yes, sir. Follow the trail and cross the river at Los Animas; then turn down the river on the old government trail—first house to the right after you leave town."

"Is that the place where we see those trees?"

"No. Malone's place is a little this side of there."

"How far from here?"

"About thirty miles."

"Do you reside in that locality?"

"Yes, sir; just on this side of the river, on Homestead bottom. My mother and sister live with me."

"Do you know Tomato Charley and the Kid?"

"Quite well. I presume the Kid is dead by this time, for the doctor had about given him up day before yesterday. I don't know where Charley is, but it was reported that the Lardo gang had got him, too. I told them to get back north of the river a month ago, but they didn't do it."

"Were they taking anyone's cattle but their own?"

"No, that's the trouble. There is the damnedest gang—beg pardon, ladies—of rustlers just south of the river here that ever operated in any country. It seems to be a place where thieves and devils prosper and honest men suffer. Good day."

He tipped his hat, put spurs to his horse and was gone.

"An honest, manly fellow, and he looks some like old Uncle Zach," said the general, as they started on.

Their horses were getting tired, but they urged them into a gallop.

"Don't give up, Roany," said Blue Eye, as she patted the great horse on the neck.

They reached the river, and as they crossed the bridge they met Tomato Charley. By this time their horses were so tired they could scarcely walk.

"How's the Kid, Charley?" asked the general, as soon as he got within hearing.

"Bin mighty low, but he's better now. Here, Blue Eye, ye'll trade hosses 'ith me, an' go on, fer he wants t' see ye. I jis' come f'om there, an' he wus a-wonderin' why ye didn't come. Pore ol' Roany; ye shan't ride 'im no furder t'day, fer I'll put yer saddle on Rover. There, now; we'll be down 's soon 's I kin git some fresh hosses fer Me-Me an' th' gen'ral."

Blue Eye was gone and almost out of sight before Charley finished talking.

"Come, Rover," she would say to Charley's horse, and Rover would increase his speed as though he knew how anxious the girl was to get to the ranch.

"Come, Rover, come! You are almost as great a horse as Roany. It makes the last part of the ride easier to go at this gait. He wants to see me, too. Been mighty low. I wonder where his sweethearts are? But I will soon know. Come, Rover. Hurry! Oh, the last mile! How long it seems! Come, Rover, faster!"

She did not slow up at the gate, but slipped her foot from the stirrup, sprang from the horse, and started on a run up the gravel path toward the house. Mrs. Malone saw her coming, opened the door, threw her arms about her, and kissed her.

"Come in, Blue Eye; we need no introduction. What a dear, good girl you are to come

away down here. Don't cry like that, for he's better now. Come, we will look in. If he's asleep we must not wake him."

Blue Eye was standing beside the bed when I awoke, and when I spoke to her she placed her cheek against mine and commenced to cry aloud. Mrs. Malone came back into the room, stood wiping her eyes, and, if I remember right, brushed a few tears off my own cheeks.

"Come, Blue Eye," said Mrs. Malone, "we must go out into the other room."

"Not now, please. Leave me with the Kid for a few moments, for I want to ask him something," and she at once became calm, took up the towel and a pan of water and bathed my face.

"Will you tell me something, Kid?"

"Certainly," said I. "What do you want to know?"

"Well, I thought I would not ask you right away, but I just can't help it."

She paused, walked across the room and stood for a few moments looking down toward the river. Nona and Helen came in, but Blue Eye did not see them, and they left the room as quietly as they came.

"Well, Kid, it's this," and she came back, sat down on the side of the bed and took one of my hands in her own. "I ought not to be so curious, but I must know something. You will probably call me silly, but I can't help that. I want to know where those sweethearts are you have talked so much about."

"Is that all, Blue Eye?"

"Yes. I don't want to make a show of myself in their presence, and I think I have a right to know more than that, too. You have asked me to be your wife, and my answer is ready when you have explained matters. The river here runs wide and deep. I have come to help nurse you, because you made me love you, but if there are other girls dearer to you than I, let me stay with you until you are well and strong, then I will go."

She arose, placed her hands on her head and walked back to the window. I called her and she returned and sat down beside me.

"Blue Eye, I will never tease you again. It was cruel of me, and I can only ask forgiveness."

The little girls came in, and after I had introduced them, said: "These are my sweethearts, the girls that have caused you all the worry. Can you blame me for loving them?"

"No, and they shall be my sweethearts, too," and she smothered them both with kisses.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"I never saw you look happier, Blue Eye," said the general, as he rode up, for she had gone out to the gate to meet him.

"I am happy. You and Mrs. Clark are like parents to me, and Mrs. Malone is just as kind and nice as she can be. Kid is better, and the two sweethearts he has teased me so much about are the dearest little girls you ever saw. Here they come, now."

"Their age has something to do with it then?" said the general, laughing.

"With me, yes, and I am the happiest girl in the world. Why, I just want to give all my friends a good hug."

"You can begin with me, if you like."

"I will, then," and she threw her arms about the general's neck and kissed him.

"Didn't I tell you everything would come out all right? I just knew it would," said Me-Me, as they walked along up the gravel path toward the house.

"Yes, you told me that, but you didn't know. What a fool I was," she said to herself, but stopped meditating and introduced the people who had been so kind to her, to the general and his daughter.

"Well, Kid," said the general, as he clasped my hand, "we are all sharing Blue Eye's happiness. Pleased as we are to find you so much improved after having been told so often that

you were dead or dying, would have been joy enough for one day, but a look at Blue Eye's face makes us forget that we worried about you at all."

"He ain't got in yit," said Tomato Charley, as he came in and seated himself in the big rocking chair near the door.

"Who is that, Charley?" asked Nona, as she climbed upon his knee.

"W'y, I wus thinkin' uv Flyin' Barney. It wus at th' races 't Los Animas, th' day I started Nigger Mose up t' Rock crick. I wus waitin' fer th' roundup wagon t' come 'cross th' river, an' feelin' kind o' blue, but purty soon th' boys commenced t' come in, an' a feller goes out 'n th' square, gits on a box an' begins to holler: 'Right this way, ge'men, fer yer pool tickets. Match race fer a thousan' a side. Single heat. Three-quarters uv a mile, 'tween Kaintucky Whip an' Flyin' Barney. Come up an' bet on th' race, fer it's easy money. The odds 're five t' one on Kaintucky Whip. Come up an' git yer tickets. It'll be a dead square race.' Wall, I wusn't goin' t' bet, fer I felt some lonesome anyway, but some o' th' boys put up the'r money an' then come t' me. 'Here, put up, Charley,' says one uv 'em. 'We want 'nother hunderd t' make 'er a thousan', Kaintucky Whip might fall down er bolt, an' we 'll make five thousan', an' paint th' ol' town all kin's o' red.' Well, I put up me money, an' we got th' tickets, an' w'en th' suckers 'ad all bit good an' plenty, th' hosses wus brought down this way to'ards your house an' run back t' town."

"Did you win, Charley?"

"No. Thet wus nine days ago, an' Flyin' Barney ain't got in yit. But I got me money back f'om th' ge'men 'at done th' hollerin', all right, an' 'ith purty good inter'st, too."

"How did you do it? Did you take it away from him?"

"No. W'en I got back yisterday f'om th' Picket Wire range, I made a race 'ith 'im fer two hunderd a side, an' wus t' run me Rover hoss. He 'lowed me t' pick th' track, an' name th' distance, an' he wus t' beat me ever' jump in th' road. Wall, I knowed 'is little cayuse wus afeared o' water, so I marked out th' track right 'cross th' river, jis' b'low th' bridge, an' over Homestead bottom t' th' head o' Cat crick, 'bout seventeen mile. He seen I had 'im, an' as th' money wus up, I jis' raked it in."

"Goodie, an' you beat him?"

"We never run th' race. He knowed he couldn't make 'is hoss swim th' river, an' w'en 'e r'fused t' start, th' stakeholder give me th' money. Th' feller thet runs race hosses fer a livin' ain't no smarter'n ordinary folks; it's th' sucker thet bets agin 'im thet's a-gettin' fooler all th' time. But t' think we all bet on Flyin' Barney, an' he couldn't go fast 'nough t' keep warm on a hot day."

"Where is Arkansaw Bill," asked the general, as he lighted a cigar and took a chair on the other side of the door.

"He's dead, an' there'll never be no flowers on th' grave w'at hol's 'is dirty carc'ss. He wus uv respec'ful parents, but 'is las' years wus spent in profl'gacy an' shame, an' he died d'serted, like a leper. No one ans'ered 'is cry fer help, an' no

kin' han' wus outstretched t' comfort 'im. No tears, no flowers, ner no mourners. He wus damned afore 'e died, an' 'is thievin' soul only made one little spark in hell. A murd'rer an' a thief. Killed three men, stabbed th' Kid 'in th' back, an' has stole cattle 'nough t' run a slaughter house a year. No, I didn't kill 'im, but I wus a-follerin' 'im fer thet purpose. He wus a-cuttin' a trail herd an' throwin' back some northern steers, an' Johnny Johnson called 'im down. Ye know Johnny; he used t' work up on our range. Wall, Bill pulls 'is gun an' starts t' run one uv 'is bluffs, but Johnny puts three holes inter Bill's stummick 'fore 'e hed time t' back up. But w'at makes me th' maddest uv all is, t' think I've bin eatin' an' sleepin' with 'im all these y'ars, an' him a-stealin' cattle all th' time. Jis' couldn't be hones'. I 'spect he's stole an' sol' a thousan' dollars' worth o' cattle fer 'is share a y'ar, fer eight or ten y'ars, but 't all went fer gamblin', drinkin' an' wimmen. Thar's th' whole story. He died a pauper, an' 's buried 'th out a coffin in a unknown grave, an' they all en' thet way, 'cept what's sent t' th' pen'tenchary. But tain't only cowboys thet's dishonest. I r'member one time, when I wus on th' cars comin' home f'om San Antone, ther' wus a feller with me thet didn't have no ticket, an' he give th' c'nductor a ten-dollar bill fer 'is fare. After while, when we'd rode a hunderd miles er so, mebbe, th' c'nductor comes back, an' says, 'I can't take this money you give me.'

"'What's th' matter with it?' says 'e.

"'It's Mexican money, an' I can't take it.'

" ' Then w'y don't yer give 't t' th' comp'ny?' says 'e, an' th' c'nductor walked out o' th' car.

" Stealin' f'om th' comp'ny? Course 'e wus, fer I seen 'im th' nex' summer a-drivin' a garbage wagon 't thirty-five a month an' a-boardin' hisse'f But I think gamblin' starts more boys wrong 'an anything else. Win er lose, it's all th' same, fer money won 's easy spent. They don't save it. Ef they lose, they'll borry er steal; anything t' git money t' play with. It's allus bin a rule 'ith me never t' lend a feller money 'at gambles. Clerks, an' lab'rers, an' all kin's o' perfessional men gambles, too. They work hard all week an' start out t' break th' game. They ought t' know they don't stan' no chanst ag'in' a man 'at handles th' cyards fourteen hours a day, w'en they on'y see a pack oncet a week er sich a matter, but they don't, an' I often wonder w'y th' fool killer 's so long d'layed in vis'tin' some local'ties. Yes, differ'nt kin's o' gamblin', all right, jis' like there's differ'nt kin's o' stealin'. One feller he plays th' stock market an' corners wheat, an' corn, an' beef, an' ever'thing like thet, an' bets th' market 'll go higher er lower; he's called a financeer. 'Nother 'ne bets on th' cyards, an' he's called a gambler. On the other han', one feller p'motes somethin', sells wo'thless stock, robs th' widder an' orphan out o' the'r savin's, an' he's called a shrewd business man. 'Nother breaks into houses er steals cattle an' hosses, an' he's called a thief. An', I never seen a crow so black but what ther's others jis' as dark colored. The holler might be a little differ'nt, mebbe, but all crows 'll suck aiggs, I reckon. A thief's a thief, a gambler's a gambler, a liar's a

liar, an' a drunkard's a drunkard. Ejicated people have hifalutin' names fer men in differ'nt walks o' life, but ther's on'y two sides t' a board fence. Ef ther's a knot hole on one side, ye kin see things f'om tother side ef ye'll on'y hev a look. But sassi'ty don't cut th' herd like I do. A man steals a big sum, an' ef he's sent t' prison 't all he's pard'ned out, an' people look up to 'im an' say, 'in a moment uv th'otlessn'ss he went wrong. He's give a great deal t' charity, an' 's a fine man. Fergit it.' A feller 'at steals a loaf o' bread t' keep f'om starvin', er a sack o' coal t' keep f'om freezin', is give sixty days an' branded a thief. Th' millionaire lies t' th' tax c'llector an' gives false testimony t' th' court, but ef anybody dares t' criticise 'im 'is frien's sez 'e jis' made a little mistake; but th' pore wretch 'at lies t' save 'is team er 'is las' cow f'om th' sher'ff by sayin' they're 'is wife's, 's pros'cuted fer perj'ry. An' so it goes. Th' dollar mark 's th' crookedes' thing I ever seen. Ye can't tell what bran' a steer wore by eatin' th' beef steak; ye got t' see th' hide to do thet, I reckon."

CHAPTER XXXII.

Charley left immediately for home, going by way of Rock creek, to take a letter to Mrs. Clark from the general. I was soon able to be out, and joined the girls in long rides through the sand hills, hunting wolves and mountain lions. Mr. Malone went home with the general, bought old Red's place at the head of Rock creek, came back, abandoned his ranch on the Arkansas, and began to make arrangements to move.

"I hate to leave the old homestead," said he, "but there are too many rustlers here. My cattle drift off during the winter, and I lose what ought to be my profit."

When the cattle were all gathered, they were started up the Big Sandy, Blue Eye, Me-Me, and I assisting with the drive. All went well until we reached the south fork of the Republican river. A heavy hail storm stampeded the cattle, and many of our horses were badly cut by running into the wire fences. For almost a week we rode day and night, with scarcely an hour's rest, gathering the cattle.

"We will take what we have," said Mr. Malone, as we were coming in from the hills one evening after an unusually hard day's ride, "and go on to Rock creek. I will send a man over here to join the beef roundup next month, to gather what got away."

"Where are the girls, Charles?" asked Mrs. Malone of her husband, as we rode into camp.

"We haven't seen them since morning."

"Didn't you see Nona and Helen? They rode up the canyon to meet you."

"No. We saw some Indians to the east of us this morning as we rode out, and sent Overalls Jack back to camp to tell you not to let the girls ride out today, and for him to stay and help the day herders. Didn't he come?"

"We haven't seen him since morning."

"Didn't he come back?"

"No, I tell you; and I fear the Indians have killed him and carried away the girls. If they have, what shall we do? Hurry, we must hunt them."

Blue Eye and Me-Me came around the corner of the pasture fence, screaming at the top of their voices.

"Quick! There they go up the river! See! The girls' ponies are coming back."

Muggins had come into camp after a biscuit. I had my saddle on him in an instant, and was soon in sight of the Indians, who, I could see, were carrying the girls. I was slowly gaining on them, but did not think of what I was to do when I overtook them. I had outridden Malone and the girls who were following me, and they were lost to sight. After a chase of eight or ten miles, a bullet from my sixshooter must have passed pretty close to the Indians, for they left the trail and sought shelter behind a little cleft of rocks. When I got up to within about a hundred yards of them they opened fire on me, and their bullets seemed to sing a new tune. I left the trail and got out of range as quickly as possible. Mr. Malone and Blue Eye would

have ridden up to the Indians and been killed had I not been there to wave them back. The Indians would not come out in the open, however, without carrying one of the girls in their arms. This was to keep us from firing back at them.

"Well," said the father of the girls, "let's wade in on them."

"Not now. We must wait awhile," said Blue Eye.

"Wait nothing. It's almost sundown now, and when it gets dark they will slip away."

"But they will kill the girls if we start the fight."

"Well, if they do, I'd rather they'd kill them than carry them away. Come on, Kid, if you are going to help me."

"Wait, Charlie, until we can talk this matter over. An excited man commits rash acts. It is folly to ride up there and be shot down."

"'Twould matter but little if I'm to lose my girls," but he dismounted and began to weep like a child.

"There, hear that?" he continued. "Poor little ones crying now as though they were being tortured. My God! My God!"

"How many Indians are there?" asked Blue Eye.

"Five or six," I replied.

"Oh, this is too much; I'm going after those girls," said Mr. Malone, as he made a move to mount, but I caught him and persuaded him to wait until it was dark. This he finally agreed to do.

"What will you do then?" he asked, in a tone that indicated he thought I was afraid to fight, and had persuaded him to keep out of range.

"I hardly know until I can get close enough to see their hiding place. When it is darker I will crawl up to the edge of the bluff, and, if possible, get Blue Eye up within hearing, and learn what they propose to do. She can understand them, and if they will talk it will give us the advantage. We will get back behind this little ridge and wait."

As it grew darker the coyotes came nearer and barked and howled until our ears rang with the noise. A little band of cattle on their way to the river for a drink came near us, stopped, lowered their heads and pawed up the sand as they circled around us, but finally went on their way.

"Stay here," I said to them, "and I will hang on the side of Muggins and follow these cattle. Don't move until I come back, for if you do, we may not find each other again."

After an hour's hunt I went back, convinced that the Indians were still secreted behind the bluffs.

"We must wait till the moon comes up," said I. "They are hiding on the northwest side of those rocks. You remain here, and I will return shortly after the moon comes up."

I returned to the river bottom and found the cattle had bedded themselves down near the bluff, and all was quiet. I dismounted and hid under my horse. By tapping his front legs I could make him move up, step by step. I kept

this up until within about two hundred feet of the bluff. I could hear the girls sobbing, and their calls for some one to come and get them were the most pitiful I ever heard; but I could not answer their calls, nor did I dare even to speak to them. My legs cramped, but I remained quiet. When a dim light began to show in the east I wanted to shout, for it meant a relief from the awful strain. Gradually it grew lighter, but the minutes seemed like hours. At first I could see dark objects around me, and as I watched their forms became plainer. Cattle were all about me. The Indians had staked their ponies along the bank of the river, and I was between them and the bluff. As the moon arose over the opposite bluff I saw the two girls a few feet away from the rocks, back to back, lashed together with a saddle rope. I was just thinking the Indians were asleep, when one of them walked by me, stopped and slapped the girls in the face, stamped his foot, gave a few grunts, then rolled up in his saddle blankets and lay down beside the bluff. I waited a few moments, then turning my horse, worked my way back out of sight, mounted, and rode away. I found Mr. Malone and Blue Eye out of patience and almost cross, but told them as hurriedly as I could what I had seen. We then went down to the river, circled around to where the Indians' horses were staked, and cut the stake ropes.

"The girls are lashed together, and I can pick them up with Muggins going at full speed," said I. "Now, let's get back in the shadow of the bluff."

"No, don't try that; they are too heavy for you. Let's both go and ride side by side," said Mr. Malone.

"No," said I, "that won't do, either. There is going to be some fighting before we get away, and one of us must help Blue Eye."

"Yes, that's so," he replied. "But let's do something besides stand here. Those girls never called me that I didn't go to them, and I'm going now."

"We must crawl up, leading our horses by their saddle ropes. Blue Eye will ride along close behind. We will get the girls and hand them over to her.

"That's all I want to know—that you will stay with me. Come on, for I want to go in the lead. Here is where I get even," and he started on.

"Not so fast," I whispered. "Get down and crawl."

He waved his hand back at me, indicating that I should follow, bent over a little, and went on. Would the Indians hear us? Were they all asleep, or were they waiting for us to come near enough to make sure with the first shot? The grass cracked like dry twigs and our hearts beat as loudly as a rawhide tum-tum. Faster and faster we went, and when within about one hundred feet of the girls Malone dropped his saddle rope, started on a run, stumbled, and fell over a calf that lay in the shade of a big rock. He may have said, "Bless that calf!" though I don't think he did; but on he went, and in an instant was out in the open carrying the girls. They were tied to the saddle the watchman was

using for a pillow, and when this moved he awoke and gave the alarm. I saw the saddle bumping along after him, and rushed up and cut the rope. They were quickly thrown over the saddle in front of Blue Eye, who, putting spurs to her horse, went galloping down the river.

"Here's where I get even," said Mr. Malone, after quiet had been restored. "My left arm stings a little, and I realize now what a tight place we were in. Five to two, but we had them going and down to our number before they woke up. Your plan was best, but I was so excited I would have ridden right into the camp and opened up on them."

Blue Eye stopped after carrying the girls about a mile, dismounted, and untied the rope that bound them together.

"Are you hurt?" she asked, as we rode up, for she had recognized our voices.

"No," said he; "just a little scratch on my left arm. We caught them napping, and the rest was easy."

The family reunion held that night when we reached camp was the happiest one I ever attended. Although tears flowed freely our joy knew no bounds, and each in turn held the other in a long, fond embrace.

At daybreak next morning we rode up the canyon about a mile and found the body of Overalls Jack. The Indians had shot him, taken the scalp and crushed his skull. We buried the body, marked the place with rocks, returned to camp, and were soon pushing the cattle out over

the trail leading toward the head of Cottonwood gulch.

"The very place where we camped when the Indians killed my father and brother, and carried mother, sister and I away," said Blue Eye, as we rode along, bringing up the rear of the herd.

"I did not want to stop there, but feared you would all call me foolish if I said anything; but I will never camp there again."

"And I'm not in love with that place, either, for there is where those desperados attempted to rob me. I would have shown you the bones of old Tige, my pack horse, but I do not like to refer to that trip. Up here a little farther you will see the remains of old Bloch, the horse I rode to death."

"Is this the trail you came over that night, with the money hid in the bell strap?"

"Yes, and tonight we will camp at the springs in Cottonwood gulch where Speck killed those fellows who were going to hang me. See the remains of old Bloch out there?"

"Yes, poor old fellow. If I had a spade I would bury his bones."

We reached the springs in Cottonwood gulch about three o'clock in the afternoon, but did not go into camp as we intended. The trees looked like they were dying, and long streamers of webs as black as crepe hung from their branches. The ground squirrels had deserted the place, and the song birds had flown. The stillness made our flesh creep, and each experienced some new and strange feeling. We spoke in an unusually low tone, but the sound of our voices appeared to

echo back and forth across the canyon. We hurried on down to the Arickaree and camped for the night, reaching the Three Bar ranch the next night. From there we went on to Rock creek, having been twelve days on the trail coming from Los Animas.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It was the first of November when I turned in my string of horses at the Three Bar and received my pay for the summer's work. Tobe was making ready for a trip to "Ol' Kaintuck." Speck was expecting some people from "de fadderland, und Katrina Liebst vas coomin' mit dem."

Time had dealt kindly with Uncle Jimmy, and he remembered well the summer he and Dead Eye Dick went south and brought back twice as many cattle as Tomato Charley and I had turned the past season. The story of the tragic ending of Arkansaw Bill's career had been carried north, and while all were somewhat surprised, no one had a kind word for him. He had lived the life he chose, drank deeply from the cup he called pleasure, and had passed from sight. The highest praise he sought from his acquaintances, when alive, was the title "a bad man," but he failed to make good.

"You can come back when you want to," said Dan, as I was taking my leave. "You have done us good work, and I shall keep a place for you. Drawing your salary is about all you will have to do this winter if you want to stay."

I thanked him for his kindness, and told him I might return for a few weeks, but would not come back to work. He seemed disappointed, but when I told him I thought of taking up land

and making myself a home he was very much pleased.

"Get a place close to General Clark's, on Rock creek, and marry Blue Eye. She is about the sweetest girl I ever knew, and you are my best friend. When I can help you, let me know, and I will be only too glad to reciprocate for the many extra services you have rendered us."

When I reached Rock creek, Nigger Mose was the first to greet me. He remembered seeing me at Los Animas, but I did not recognize him.

"Hello, Snowball," said I, as I dismounted and led my horse into the stable.

"Dat ain't mah name, suh."

"No? What is it, then?"

"Niggah Mose."

"Are you the boy who carried the letter up here for Charley?"

"Yas, suh, Ise de boy, an' Ise neber goin' back. Dis heah gin'ral am dis sich a fine fellah, an' Misses she dis like my ol' mammy to me, an Ise dis gwine to stay right heah."

"Then let me tell you something, Mose; something for your own good. They told me down at Los Animas that you would steal everything you could get your hands on; that you would lie, gamble, and get drunk. None of that goes around here, and you will have to quit it all, go to work and earn an honest living."

"Fer de Lawd's sake, Kid, I'se done quit dat all now. Down dar I dis had t' do dem t'ings, er I'd bin cut clean out an' socialistically prognostercated."

"Been what?"

"Yas, suh, I dis couldn't er moved in good sassi'ty. Up here Ise a honest niggah, suh. Has yer got some gin in dat bottle what's stickin' out o' yo' saddle pocket dar? I dis like ter feel my dizziness ag'in. Would fer a fac', suh."

"No gin, Mose; that's horse liniment."

"Mought quench my craven'us ap'tite wif some ob dat."

"You'll quench something if you drink it, for it is poison. Ghosts in that bottle, all right."

"Goses! Fo' de Lawd's sake! I ain't los' no goses."

"Well, Kid," said the general, after the greetings were over, "we had better repair to the pantry," and as he took my arm and started across the room, asked: "Did you ever see any sugar square cut?"

"Yes, and I have also seen some that was cut square," so with a lump in a wine glass and with some fine old brandy poured over it, we drank the health of the people of Rock creek. We spent a week at Malone's, helping him get his buildings ready for winter. Then came the usual fall hunt, far out into the sand hills above the head of the creek. We returned with enough buffalo meat for the winter, and to spare.

It was nearing Christmas and we were all enjoying the comforts of our quarters. The wind was howling outside and the windows were covered with frost. Nona and Helen had come down to spend the holidays with us, and incidentally to tease Blue Eye a little about my Arkansas sweethearts. The general had grown reminiscent, and was again relating his experiences while scouting with old Uncle Zach.

"Tell us about his wife and babies, general," said Nona, as she took a seat on the footstool in front of him.

"Yes," said Helen, as she climbed upon his knee. "Were they about our size when the Indians killed them?"

"No, they were tiny little babies then. That was twenty years ago. I have often thought it possible they might not be dead, as the Indians seldom kill women and little children. Of course, I know but little of the Snakes and Piutes of Idaho, but from what I know of other tribes, I would say it is likely that Mrs. Foiley and her children are alive, unless they have died since they were captured. Old Uncle Zach spoke as if he thought they were living, but he had hunted so long for them he had given up in despair. I have just received a patent for the ranch over on the Beaver, and if I ever do find them they shall have a home. The land is very valuable, and I shall hold it as long as I live, even though we never hear from them. If they ever should be found, it will be some cold, dark night when we least expect them, for, you know, it could hardly be otherwise. Shipwrecked sailors often return after being carried many miles from home, mourned as dead for years, the fond wife or loving mother always keeping the light burning brightly in the window when the breakers roll the highest. Wayward children return home when winter's chilly blasts bite hardest, and people held captive by the Indians often make their escape when the storm rages fiercest. I have felt for several days that we are to be surprised before long, and even tonight we may

be asked for lodging by some one of that class who has lost his way."

The general spoke so earnestly that we all felt pretty much as he did, and really believed some one was near, hunting for shelter. All were quiet, thinking. A noise at the kitchen door startled us, but it was only old Bud who had come up from the stable. He shook the snow from his wolfskin cap, turned out his lantern, hung it up, came in and stood frying the water out of his big leather faced mittens on the stovepipe.

"I knowed it wus comin'; me corns has been hurtin' worse an' worse, an' I jis' knowed th' storm wus—"

"Oh, Bud! Bud!" said the general, "spare us that story of the corns. We don't want to hear it; and please lay your mittens down under the stove to dry, instead of filling the room with fumes of burning leather."

The old man did not reply, but backed up in the corner and sat down in the woodbox. It was the first time in his life he had been denied the pleasure of giving his observation on the weather as indicated by his corns. He was hurt, and his face plainly showed it. He sat with his head resting on one of his hands for a few moments, then retired without saying good night.

"I'm sorry I hurt the old fellow's feelings," said the general, "but I simply can't stand his corns. I think I have suffered more on account of them than he has. There has not been a storm on the plains the past fifteen years that

he did not know by his corns it was coming; that is, after it had got here."

"Did he ever try water to see what effect that would have on those corns?" asked Nona, and she looked at us as if wondering what we were laughing at.

All were soon quiet again and looking as serious as ever. The snow beat against the windows with increased fury. The wind whistled more loudly as it drove on toward the south. It was nearly midnight, and why we were not all in bed no one had ventured to say. Nigger Mose startled us by rushing in from the bunk house ,looking as if he were scared half to death.

"Fo' de Lawd's sake, General, come out heah, quick! Sumpin' awful's gwine ter happen ef ye don't."

"Well, I guess we had better go, then. What seems to be the matter, Mose?"

"Well I reckon de sun not gwine ter shine ternight, lak it do on de Fo'th ob July, kaise he's dun gone too fur souf fer dat."

"Yes?"

"Yas, suh, an' I doan' convince myse'f dat dis heah weathah am not conductious to pleasan' dreams ef yer hab ter use er snowdrif' fer a piller, an' cover yerse'f wif de blue dome ob heaben."

"For pity's sake, what is the matter? Have you gone crazy?"

"Yas, suh. De light f'om de boriealice shine out ob de norf, but he ain't got no heat ter cheer de weary trabler on he way, suh. I cain't dis splainate de whyfore ub de thusness, ner why de

hencity ub de hencefo'thness is not identical ob de neberdelessness ub de heretofoh. Yassah, I like de good ol' souf lan' de bes'.

"'Down whar de song birds go,
'Down whar de souf winds blow,
'Down whar de pickaninnies grow,
'In dat good ol' Souf lan'.'"

"What have we here, anyway—one end of a negro minstrel show?"

"No, suh, hit's dis one aind ob Niggah Mose. An' I 'spec' ef ye'll dis peramm'late down by de stable, ye'll find somebudy dat am too much snow blindness to fin' de way up heah t' de house. Golly, nice an' wahm in heah; 'tis for a fac'."

"Is there some one down at the stable, Mose? Is that what you have been trying to tell us?"

"Yassah. But I done tol' 'em, suh, dat dey's mighty artisticrat'cally folks live heah, an' dey couldn't come ontel dey sent in dey cyards. Got ter be mighty pow'ful keerful 'bout pore trash what am out snoopin' aroun'."

But the general and I had gone to the stable, where we found a man and woman, almost frozen.

"Come with me," said the general. "The Kid will take care of your horses," and he led them to the house.

No questions were asked. All were silent, watching the strangers as they sat by the stove. When I entered, they arose and extended their hands.

"General," said I, "it's Frank and Ollie Everton."

"Not now," said Frank. "Introduce us as Foiley, the children of old Uncle Zach."

"Are we greeting the children of old Uncle Zach Foiley?" said the general, "stolen from him nearly twenty years ago?"

"Yes, sir; and we have come to see if you can tell us where he is. We lost our way down the creek here, and thought for awhile that we must surely give up; but we are here, and the warm greeting we have received goes deeper than the heat of the stove."

"We are glad you feel that way, for you are certainly as welcome as if you were members of our own family."

"We thank you. Do you know where father is?"

"Yes. He has been dead almost a year."

"Too late, too late, Frank," said the girl, as she arose and threw her arms about her brother's neck. It was some minutes before either could speak.

"Poor old father! All our lives he has been hunting for us, and to think we have been living so near him. Too bad, isn't it, sister?"

The girl made an effort to answer, but hid her face in her hands, and the boy continued:

"We were only little tots, by the name of Overton, when we moved to the Boise basin. Where we lived prior to that time, we will never know. When we were about twelve years old an old prospector told us of the Indian troubles in the Owyhees, and the supposed death of our father. Mother had never told us this, or what our real name was. Our stepfather was of a roving disposition, or, in other words, utterly worthless; and although he kept us on the go most of the time, I managed to earn enough

to support the family and give Ollie an education. I went to school a part of two terms when we were in the Coeur d'Alenes, in Northern Idaho, but that was all. About four years ago we moved to the ranch on the Arkansas, just across the river from Charles Malone's, but every one knew us as the Overton children. After mortgaging all our stock and the ranch, our stepfather left. The property was sold at sheriff's sale, and a short time ago mother died. When she learned she had to go, she told us our real name; that she thought father was up here somewhere, and if not, you would know, for you and he had scouted together. The Kid here had told us of old Uncle Zach, but we never dreamed that the kindly old soul was our father. We have nothing left but our two ponies and saddles, but the suspense is over and I can soon find work. Dry your tears, sister; we must forget the past and commence making plans for the future. We owe the Kid an apology for not visiting him oftener while at Malone's, but we were so worried about our own affairs we could not see anyone."

"Not at all," said I. "My only regret is that I did not know your name was Foiley when I first met you; but matters could be worse. General, tell them of the old Beaver homestead, and the cattle we gathered last summer."

"I have been waiting for the opportunity. Shortly after your father died I went to Denver and applied for administrator's papers. I then asked the land office officials to have a patent issued to the heirs of Zach Foiley. This was done, and the county judge appointed me

trustee for those heirs. The land is the most valuable of any in the country, and we have gathered about fifty head of cattle. The Z. F. brand is yours, and when we can go to Denver the property can be transferred to you children."

"Do you hear that, sister?" said Frank, and the tears again came to their eyes.

"Yes, but it all sounds so strange and foreign. Without you I should have died of neglect, but here I am surrounded by friends, so good and so kind, I cannot realize it all now. My strength is gone, and I must lie down. I have a kiss for you all, and will thank you again tomorrow."

* * * * *

Three years have passed since Frank and Ollie Foiley came to the general's ranch on Rock creek. Three times have the Sioux and Cheyennes made their annual pilgrimages south, and three times have they returned to the reservation. Three times have the song birds returned from the southland, and three times have they gone back to their winter home. Blue Eye has been my wife for three years, and my little sweethearts haunt her no more. Tobe and Edna live on the Arickaree, and near them is the home of Speck and Katrina. Me-Me has a brother and sister, Ab Clark, Jr., and little Eva. The general transferred the Beaver ranch, once owned by Uncle Zach, to the heirs, Frank and Ollie, and they are now prosperous and happy. Old Dan still rides the range, and Uncle Jimmy has lived in communities where there were fewer rustlers. The widow eloped from Binkleman with a pat-

ent medicine fakir, and Tomato Charley writes from Honolulu:

"What ye heared 'bout th' islan's is all true. Th' wine o' th' banana 'll make ye glad, an' th' wimmen 'll love ye, which is nothin' ag'in' th' country, I reckon."

Old Red is still in the Rocky mountains looking for "parites uv assessment" and other hopes, while old Bud's corns have faithfully foretold the coming of every winter's storms. Charles Malone and wife are prominent people, and Nona and Helen (the Malone sisters), are the sweetest little girls in the country.

Cottonwood gulch still remains open to settlement, and the strange lights seen there on dark nights are still a mystery. The moss on the trees has turned darker, and the crepe like webs that hang from the branches now reach almost to the ground. Queer figures may be seen at night, and the howl of a coyote will echo back and forth across the canyon for several minutes. The waters from the spring flow on toward the river, and strange faces have been seen in the little pools. Many people have visited the gulch, determined on ferreting out the mysteries surrounding it, but none ever remained over night. Stock will not go to the springs for water, but keep to the ridge and hurry on to the river. The last time I visited the place was in company with the general, Charles Malone and our families. Sam, the horsebreaker from Burntwood, and Nigger Mose, accompanied us. Anyone who knows anything about colored people will tell you a majority of them are born with a fully developed imagina-

tion. This was true of Sam and Mose. They remained with us until dusk, then expressed a desire to be "Sa'nterin' erbout." They saw something up on the side hill back of the cemetery, and started south. That was many months ago, and although there were a few dollars due the boys in wages, the last heard of them they had passed through Los Animas on their way back to Texas.

Muggins and Roany share alike when the scraps of bread are carried out to them, and a sandwich with sugar on it is a part of their daily allowance.